"WE DROVE THE ALASKA HIGHWAY":

ROMANTICIZING THE ROAD NORTH

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"WE DROVE THE ALASKA HIGHWAY": ROMANTICIZING THE ROAD NORTH

A

THESIS

Presented to the Faculty

of the University of Alaska Fairbanks

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

By

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Fairbanks, Alaska

August 2006

ABSTRACT

The Alaska Highway is a road that still fascinates and draws people north more than sixty years after its initial construction. Beginning in 1942, literature concerning the road's hasty wartime construction and the men who worked on the highway led to the formation of Alaska Highway myths and legends and enticed Americans north after World War II. Many of these travelers wrote and published the accounts of their adventures, inspiring readers' to make an Alaska Highway journey as well.

The objective of this work is to show how the Alaska Highway literature perpetuates the frontier romance of the northern road. This paper examines American frontierism and how the Alaska Highway was and is a perfect outlet for Americans to have a frontier experience. Also, the paper explores the various highway literature written since 1942, particularly the "I drove the Alaska Highway" works that influenced many Americans to seek their own frontier adventures on the Alaska Highway.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Special thanks goes to my committee: Dr. Terrence Cole, Dr. Mary Ehrlander, and Dr. Mary Mangusso for all their help and encouragement with this thesis. Their suggestions, advice, and support have been wonderful and I sincerely appreciate all the time they took from their busy schedules to work with me.

I could never have completed this thesis without the love and support of my incredible husband, Tim, who always kept me going when I felt like giving up and who always has the right word.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Highways

In any given summer, tens of thousands of recreational vehicles can be seen driving on the Alaska Highway, with license plates representing all fifty U.S. states, every Canadian province and territory, as well as several foreign countries. Inevitably, a large percentage of the Recreational Vehicle drivers have a copy of the current Milepost, a mile-by-mile guidebook for the Alaska Highway and other northern roads, and many of the travelers have the book open to the listing for the exact point where their vehicle is positioned on the road. The Milepost would tell the traveler where the next stop for fuel or food might be, where the next scenic pull-off could be found, or where they might be likely to spot wildlife, such as moose or bears.

In the early years of automobile travel, travelers might also have carried a guidebook to assist them on their trip. The United States' first transcontinental highway, the Lincoln Highway, was begun in 1913 and improved gradually over the next several decades. In the 1920s, the Lincoln Highway Association published guidebooks with advertising for gas stations, hotels, restaurants, and tourist camps to aid the traveler. Because the highway went through small towns across America, the guidebooks might contain directions such as "pass in front of saloon buildings and turn left around shearing pens."[1]

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The Lincoln Highway and other named roads, such as the Dixie Highway, which connected Michigan to Florida, were run by trail associations. In addition to publishing guidebooks for their individual routes, their purpose was to promote tourism along the highway and repair the road. To fund their operations, the trail associations collected dues from travelers and businesses along the highway. Unfortunately, the dues often never made it to road maintenance. By the mid-1920s, around 450 named highways and trails crisscrossed the country.[2]

The Federal Aid Highway Act of 1925 standardized and numbered the nation's highways. For the first time, the highways were systematically mapped and given uniform signs that could be recognized by all. In addition, the highways would be run by the individual states, rather than the trail associations.[3] After World War II, more Americans than ever crowded the nations' highways, leading to the National System of Interstate and Defense Highways bill, signed by President Eisenhower on June 29, 1956. The modern Interstate Highway system was designed for speedy and efficient automobile travel across all parts of the U.S. Well-marked distance and exit signs now guided travelers as they rocketed along at 65 mph, stopping only when necessary for food, fuel, or rest. The road was simply a means to an end, the quickest way to a destination.

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> Thanks to the Interstate Highway System, it is now possible to travel across the country from coast to coast without seeing anything. From the Interstate, America is all steel guard rails and plastic signs, and every place looks and feels and sounds and smells like every other place.[4]

Most travelers driving the Alaska Highway are doing so for much different reasons than those they have for driving across the Interstate. They are often hoping to have a frontier experience, and they often visualize a wilderness adventure on the Alaska Highway many years before they actually make the trip. After studying travel guidebooks, like The Milepost, and reading about the adventures of others, travelers carefully plan a trip up the Alaska Highway, envisioning a journey they can tell their children and grandchildren about.

The Frontier Thesis

The dream of leaving the ordinary in search of new frontiers has been part of the American character since the first settlers arrived from Europe. From colonial times, Americans began streaming west, crossing barrier after barrier, until the Pacific Ocean was reached. In 1890, the U.S. Census Bureau declared the frontier to be closed, even though much of the American West remained empty of people. While Americans were alarmed at the census announcement, they did not stop looking for new frontiers.

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In 1893, thirty-two year old Frederick Jackson Turner presented his groundbreaking paper "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" to the American Historical Association in Chicago. Written as a response to the 1890 Census, Turner's thesis stated that: "The existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession, and the advance of American settlement westward, explain American development."[5] Basically, Turner's thesis asserted that frontier individualism brought about American democracy. In addition, Turner implicitly referred to the frontier dream when he wrote in his essay about the independent American who needed to escape the past and the restraints of civilized society.[6]

In her book, Go For It! Finding Your Own Frontier, Dr. Judith Kleinfeld goes beyond Turner's thesis to advance the idea that the frontier is an American state of mind, not a specific location, and that frontiers can be found anywhere. She explains:

> In the American imagination, the frontier is a realm of risk and adventure, a place where people have the courage to take a stand, to go for it. The frontier is a place where people show that they can take risks, that they can do it, that they are made of the right stuff.[7]

Kleinfeld's work offers various examples of people who left the lives they were expected to live and set out to discover new frontiers, with mostly successful results. She writes, "More land space does not create a frontier. A driving spirit creates a frontier. A restless

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imagination creates a frontier."[8] Thus, a frontier can be a personal challenge, rather than a physical location.

The Alaska Highway as a Frontier

In 1942, the Alaska Highway became an outlet for the American frontier dream. The 1,400 mile road through the Alaskan and Canadian wilderness fascinated Americans, and its hurried eight month construction by the U.S. Army became legendary. The world was in a state of turmoil because of World War II, and Americans were frightened by events in Europe, Asia, and especially the Japanese attacks on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, and Alaska's Aleutian Islands. Stories of the Alaska Highway's construction proved to be great morale boosters for the American public, and the Alaska Highway workers were romanticized as heroes. Americans dreamed of traveling north after the war to see and experience the frontier road.

Since the war's end, hundreds of thousands of Americans have streamed north for an Alaska Highway adventure. While the road has been significantly improved since 1942, travelers head up the highway believing they will have an adventure in the northern wilderness. They have preconceived ideas that they are entering an exotic frontier and will suffer some hardship along the way. Often, travelers return to their homes and are admired by friends and family for their accomplishment of making an Alaska Highway journey, and they display with pride their "I survived the Alaska Highway" bumper stickers.

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The "I drove the Alaska Highway" literature provided a way for armchair adventurers to experience the journey without leaving the comfort of their own homes. In addition, the literature inspired others to make the journey, who in turn wrote their own highway accounts. Through these works, as well as histories, journals, guidebooks, magazine and newspaper articles, government publications, and even movies and advertising, Americans continue to believe that the Alaska Highway journey is a wonderful way to have a frontier experience. More importantly, the "I drove the Alaska Highway" literature is instrumental in perpetuating the frontier romance and mythology of the highway.

Chapter 2: Building the Road North

Evolution of the Alaska Highway

Before the Klondike gold rush of 1898, little interest had been given Alaska and the Yukon by the southern inhabitants of either the U.S. or Canada. The discovery of gold in the Yukon Territory and Alaska in the late 1890s lured thousands of Americans to the North in search of adventure and wealth. Enticed by gold fever, a massive surge of people left everything they had known to go to a distant and remote land and an uncertain future.

Many of the hopeful prospectors who headed to the Klondike really had no idea where the northern gold fields were located. In the frenzy that followed the gold discovery announcement, misinformation was printed on how to get to the Klondike, and wild ideas were formulated for northern transportation, such as the "Klondike Bicycle," the "boat sled," and the hot air balloon.[1] Of course, none of these contraptions proved to be successful.

Because the Klondike gold fields were located at the confluence of the Yukon and Klondike Rivers, near the midway point of the Yukon Territory's border with Alaska, they were inaccessible by conventional transportation methods, such as railroad or highway. It was necessary to travel there by boat, sled, or on foot. Those with enough money could take a boat from Seattle up the western coast of Canada and half way around Alaska to where the great Yukon River empties into the Bering Sea. Then, they

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would transfer to a sternwheeler for a trip up the Yukon to Dawson City, the gold rush boom town.

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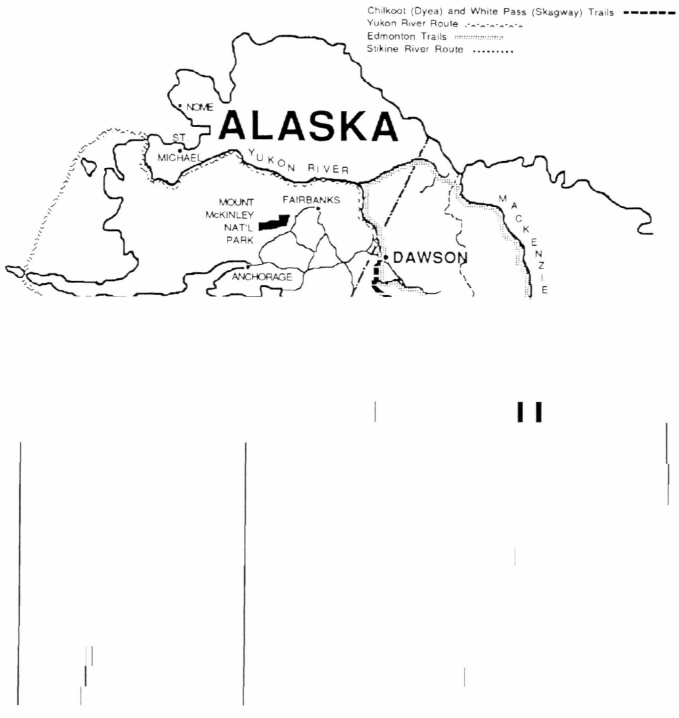

Fig. 2.1 – Modern map showing major gold rush trails.
Melanie J. Mayer; Klondike Women (Ohio University Press, 1989), 10.

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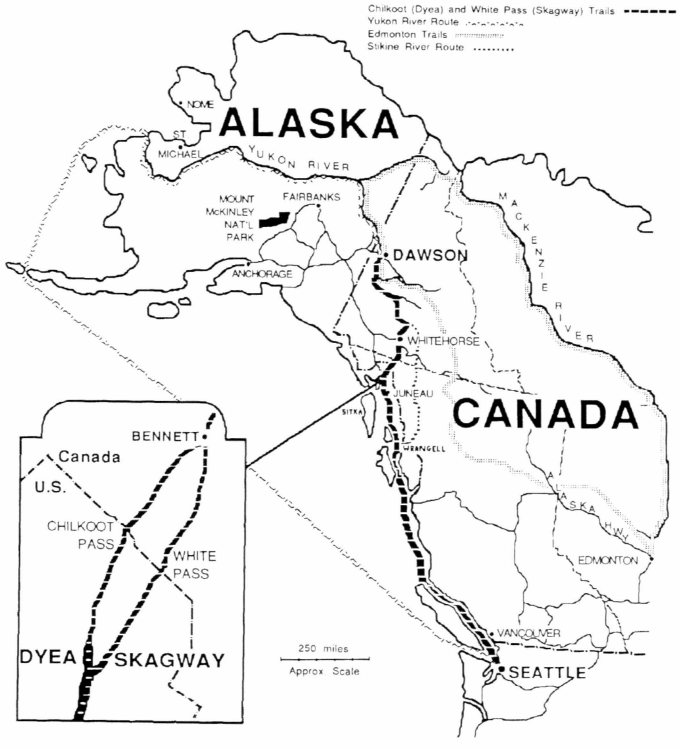

Fig. 2.1 – Modern map showing major gold rush trails.
Melanie J. Mayer; Klondike Women (Ohio University Press, 1989), 10.

Other routes to the Klondike were traversed as well, but they often proved to be more treacherous. These routes included the "All-American" route which began at Port Valdez, on Prince William Sound, across a massive and extremely dangerous ice field, and over several valleys to the Copper River. Then, the travelers crossed a mountain divide to finally reach the Tanana River in Alaska's interior, which flowed into the Yukon River of Klondike gold rush fame. Most who tried the "All-American" route turned back when they attempted to cross the ice field, but a rare few managed to make it through to the gold fields.[2]

Several "All-Canada" routes existed also, and these proved to be as difficult as the "All-American" route. The Edmonton trail was advertised by city officials and merchants as "the back door to the Yukon"[3] but was actually the longest and most difficult route of those attempted. In September of 1897, Canadian Mountie J.D. Moodie and his men set out from Edmonton, Alberta, with instructions to find the best route to the Klondike. He eventually arrived at Ft. Selkirk on the Yukon River, 1600 miles from Edmonton, on October 24, 1898, nearly fourteen months later. Moodie then returned south by a different route and informed his superiors: "Advise go by Skagway."[4] The Alaska Highway would later be constructed following the lower part of Moodie's route.

Transportation routes to and in Alaska and the Yukon expanded slowly over the next thirty years. At the turn of the century, a railroad was built from Skagway to Whitehorse, a community located just over the mountains on the gold rush trail,

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[2] Berton, 211-212.
[3] Berton, 231.
[4] Heath Twichell, Northwest Epic (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 8.

connecting the coast with the Yukon's river systems. By 1909, the Fairbanks-Valdez Trail, a rough track between Valdez, a port city on Prince William Sound, and Fairbanks, located in the center of the Alaska territory, had been constructed, providing an overland route into Alaska's interior. In 1923, the Alaska Railroad, a modern transportation link between the port of Seward, on the Kenai Peninsula, and Alaska's largest town, Fairbanks, officially began operations.[5] The only railroad constructed by the U.S. government, the Alaska Railroad was built to open Alaska's interior to development.

Travelers to Alaska and the Yukon continued to make the journey by ship up the Inside Passage, to Seward to catch the train or around Alaska and up the Yukon River, into Alaska's interior. In addition, all goods going to and coming from the territories traveled by ship. By the early 1920s, politicians and businessmen in the Pacific Northwest, who had controlled shipping to the North for decades, began to see that a road to Alaska and the Yukon could bring increased economic prosperity by opening the territories to additional development.[6]

One of the first highway promoters, Simon Fraser Tolmie, the Conservative premier of British Columbia during the 1920s, saw a road to the north as an excellent way to boost his province's economy by opening the area to development and tourism. He felt that the highway would bring a great number of American tourists through British Columbia and promoted such a highway vigorously to both the Canadian and American governments. To garner publicity for the project, Tolmie took a group of government

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[5] Walter R. Borneman, Alaska: Saga of a Bold Land (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2003), 267.
[6] Ken Coates, North to Alaska (Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 1992), 21.

officials to Hazelton, British Columbia, the furthest northern point by rail, west of the Northern Rockies, where he proposed to begin the road north.[7]

In Alaska, road engineer Donald McDonald tirelessly promoted a highway from British Columbia to Alaska. A respected and knowledgeable Alaskan engineer, McDonald convinced the Alaskan legislature to provide some funding to research the project. However, because the project was so huge, federal funds would be necessary for the highway to be constructed.[8] To this end, McDonald felt a bit of publicity might help garner support for the idea.

Publicity came in the form of Slim Williams, an Alaskan sourdough who, on a bet, decided to drive his dog team from Valdez, Alaska, to Chicago, and the Century of Progress Fair. With funding from Donald McDonald and a letter of introduction from Tony Dimond, Alaska's newly elected Delegate to Congress, Williams set off on November 21, 1932, and arrived in Chicago on September 16, 1933. Williams traveled what would later be called Route A, near the Pacific Coast, and upon reaching Hazelton, British Columbia, he traded his sled runners for wheels. In Chicago, Williams met Tony Dimond, who invited him to continue on to Washington, D.C., to meet with President Roosevelt, which Williams did. He stayed in Washington for the winter, meeting with government officials and promoting the construction of the road.[9]

As Williams neared Chicago with his dog team, the Depression led to a change of government in British Columbia. The province replaced Conservative premier Tolmie

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[7] Robin Fisher, "T.D. Pattullo and the British Columbia to Alaska Highway," in The Alaska Highway: Papers of the 40th Anniversary Symposium, ed. Kenneth Coates (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1985), 10.
[8] Stan Cohen, Alcan and Canol (Missoula, MT: Pictorial Histories Publishing Company, 1992), 1.
[9] Twichell, 15-18.

with Liberal T. Duff Pattullo, who had opposed Tolmie's highway plan simply out of political obstinance. But after his election, Pattullo began promoting the construction of a road north as a way to provide jobs for his Depression-weary province. Pattullo sought assistance from the Canadian government, but when none was forthcoming, he turned to the U.S. government and President Roosevelt. The President was a strong proponent of a road to Alaska, although he hesitated to commit funds for the project. The encouraging reaction of President Roosevelt alarmed Canadian Prime Minister Mackenzie King, who, fearing American expansionism, quickly put a stop to U.S. involvement.[10]

Interest in a highway to Alaska grew, and in 1938 an International Highway Commission, led by Washington State Congressman Warren Magnusson, was created by the U.S. government to investigate the feasibility of a road and to determine the best route for the highway. Prime Minister King, urged on by Pattullo, reluctantly created a similar Canadian commission. Eventually, the two groups chose two possible routes to Alaska. The U.S. Commission favored Route A, a passage that followed the Pacific west coast. Route B, preferred by the Canadians, followed the Rocky Mountain ranges and passed through Dawson City, the capital of the Yukon Territory.[11]

Not to be left out, boosters from Edmonton, Alberta, later proposed a third route. Joined by promoters from Montana and North Dakota, the Edmonton group formed the U.S.-Canada-Alaska Prairie Highway Association and presented a route that would run from the U.S. prairie states through Alberta, then north to Whitehorse and Alaska.[12] In

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[10] Coates, 23.
[11] Coates, 24-25.
[12] K.S. Coates and W.R. Morrison, The Alaska Highway in World War II (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992), 27-28.

addition, the Arctic explorer Vilhjalmur Stefansson proposed a very long and arduous route that would follow the Mackenzie River. Because of its remoteness, however, the route was never given serious attention.[13]

None of the routes had been given much consideration by the U.S. and Canadian governments initially. The confusion and destruction of World War II had begun in Europe and Asia, distracting and worrying North American leaders. The two countries established the Permanent Joint Board on Defense to plan and make decisions concerning U.S. and Canadian defensive measures. One of their decisions involved establishing the Northwest Staging Route, a series of airfields from Edmonton, Alberta, to Fairbanks, Alaska, for ferrying aircraft and military supplies to the North.[14]

As late as 1939, the U.S. military's presence in Alaska consisted of one post, Chilkoot Barracks, at Haines, located at the upper end of the Inside Passage. It was very feebly manned and had only one old tug for transportation. Japanese military activities in Asia and the Pacific finally motivated the U.S. Congress to fund construction of several army bases and naval stations around Alaska in 1940 and 1941.[15] Also in 1941, the Soviet Union became a participant in the U.S. Lend-Lease program, under which everything from butter to tanks was sent to the beleaguered Russians to help with their war effort. As part of this program, U.S. aircraft were flown over the Northwest Staging Route, now called the ALSIB (Alaska-Siberia) route, from Great Falls, Montana, to

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[13] Stan Cohen, The Trail of '42 (Missoula, MT: Pictorial Histories Publishing Company, 1979), 13.
[14] Coates, 28.
[15] Claus-M. Naske and Herman E. Slotnick, Alaska: A History of the 49th State, 2nd Edition (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), 121-122.

Fairbanks, Alaska, where the planes were released to Soviet pilots, who then flew the aircraft on to Siberia and the Russian front.[16]

Regardless of the military's increased presence in Alaska, U.S. military leaders did not feel the highway through Canada was necessary. The navy felt that it could adequately protect shipping and communication between Alaska and the southern states. In Canada, government officials could not see any defensive need for the highway. However, discussions about highway construction continued among various government officials in Washington, D.C., but at a low priority.

The Alaska Highway's priority changed on December 7, 1941. The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor destroyed a good portion of the U.S. naval force, making it uncertain whether the Navy could continue protecting the sea lanes to Alaska. Suddenly, discussion of a highway to Alaska as a supply route for troops stationed in the North took on more importance, and a decision was made by both U.S. government officials and the military that a road would be built.

The U.S. Army Engineers carefully considered each of the proposed routes but eventually chose to build a road that would link the airfields of the Northwest Staging Route, providing a quicker method for supplying the airfields with fuel and supplies. Most of the highway would follow the prairie route, and then Route A from Whitehorse to Big Delta. The route was roughly traced on a map with very little understanding of

[16] Naske and Slotnick, 127.

what terrain would need to be traversed, as no studies of the area the route was to take through the Canadian Rockies had ever been undertaken.[17]

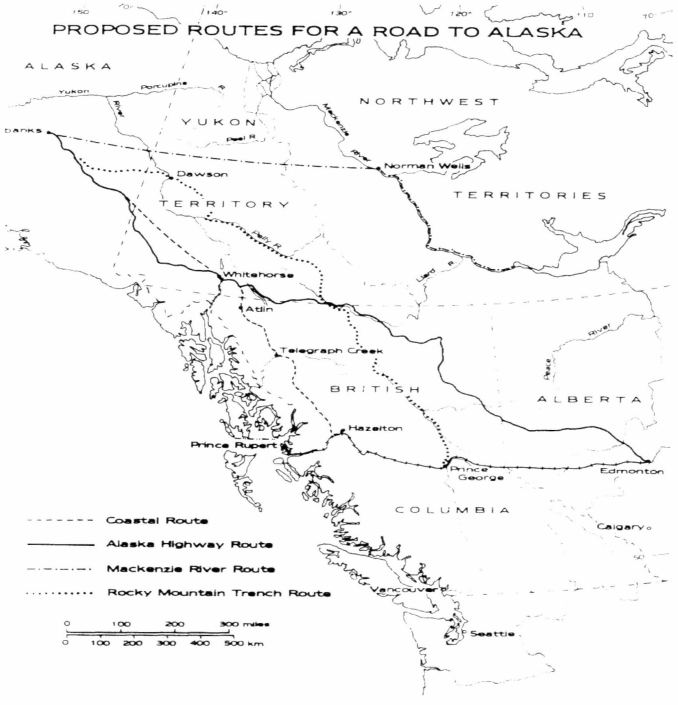

Fig. 2.2 – Proposed Alaska Highway routes.
Stan Cohen, The Trail of '42 (Missoula, MT: Pictorial Histories Publishing Company, 1979), 14.

British Columbian, Washington, and Alaskan politicians and business leaders initially protested the highway route chosen by the army. By not following either Route A or B from the Pacific Northwest, the route bypassed both Washington State and most of British Columbia, as well as the Southeast Alaska panhandle. In addition, the route chosen frustrated Yukoners because it completely bypassed Dawson City, the territory's

[17] Twichell, 55.

capital and economic center. Of course, the prairie route promoters were quite pleased, although surprised, by the choice of routes.[18]

Before any construction could begin on the highway, the United States needed approval from Prime Minister Mackenzie King's government. The Canadian government approved the project with some apprehension calling the highway a "dubious egg" and stipulating that the U.S. would pay for the road. For providing road rights-of-way, tax waivers, and other provisions, the completed Canadian portion of the highway would be turned over to Canada six months after the end of the war.[19]

Construction of the Alaska Highway

In March of 1942, the U.S. military selected Colonel William Hoge, a commander in the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, to lead the Alaska Highway construction project. The directive of Hoge's supervisor, Brigadier General Sturdevant, emphasized the urgency of the undertaking. "The pioneer road will be pushed to completion with all speed within the physical capacity of the troops."[20] Because of the magnitude of this task, Hoge later divided leadership responsibilities with Colonel James A. O'Connor, with Hoge leading construction on the more difficult northern half and O'Connor the southern half.[21]

Before Hoge could begin to fulfill his directive, the Colonel and several of his colleagues headed north to examine the prospective highway route. The reconnaissance mission was necessary because much of the proposed highway route had never been

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[18] Coates, 32-33.
[19] Coates and Morrison, 31.
[20] Letter, Sturdevant to Hoge, 3 March 1942, quoted in John T. Greenwood, "General Bill Hoge and the Alaska Highway," in The Alaska Highway: Papers of the 40th Anniversary Symposium, 42.
[21] Cohen, The Trail of '42, 15.

surveyed. To aid the group, Hoge enlisted the help of Native guides and local bush pilots. In particular, Hoge flew over the mountains, bogs, and rivers between Fort Nelson and Whitehorse with Les Cook, a local pilot who became legendary for his aerial feats.[22] Hoge also looked over the available services in the small towns along the highway's route, as well as train service to Whitehorse and Dawson Creek, and found them to be minimal, but adequate.

Once Hoge had a better idea of what he was up against, he began mapping out a strategy to begin construction. Divided into northern and southern sectors, the project had headquarters in the south at Fort St. John and in the north at Whitehorse. These towns were chosen for their access to transportation systems, as Fort St. John had connections to the Canadian road system and the White Pass and Yukon Railway connected the port at Skagway to Whitehorse. Transportation and communication problems between the sectors became two of the largest issues with the highway project, due to the distances involved.

Seven regiments were assigned to work on the two sections; four in the north and three in the south. Colonel Hoge divided the northern regiments so that two worked south from Whitehorse and two worked north towards Big Delta in Alaska. For the southern regiments, it was of the utmost importance to get one regiment and all of its heavy equipment across the Peace River between Fort St. John and Fort Nelson, British Columbia, before the spring thaw.[23]

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[22] Coates, 36.
[23] Greenwood, 40-41.

The first of the engineer troops began arriving in Dawson Creek, British Columbia, in March of 1942 and set to work immediately. Northerners looked on in astonishment as the Army's heavy equipment roared through forests and over mountains, knocking down everything in its path. The influx of Americans and machinery into the Canadian wilderness overwhelmed the small communities along the route, permanently changing them.

Surveyors came through the woods first, attempting to mark a reasonable path for the road to follow. However, the surveyors were often only a step or two in front of the bulldozers, as the Army hurried to push through the pioneer road. Behind the tractors came crews building ditches and bridges, grading, widening, and surfacing.[24] In June of 1942, the urgency to complete the road became more frantic when the Japanese attacked Alaska's Aleutian Islands and the need for an access road to the north to provide supplies and equipment to U.S. troops fighting the enemy became a priority.[25]

During construction, the soldiers building the road faced many difficulties particular to the Canadian and Alaskan north. In the summer months, mosquitoes and black flies constantly plagued the men, along with clinging mud that crept into boots and clothing.[26] Of course, in the winter, the severe cold tormented the soldiers. Black troops, many of whom came from America's Deep South, had never experienced winter.[27] The 35th Engineers, from Camp Robinson, Arkansas, had trained for the Pacific in California

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[24] David A. Remley, Crooked Road (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1976), 67.
[25] Terrence Cole, et al, Alaska or Bust: The Promise of the Road North (Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 1992), 78.
[26] Coates, 91.
[27] Coates, 104.

shortly after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, not for the Arctic, and came to their assignment in the north unprepared for the intense cold.[28]

The engineer regiments and their officers also had no preparation for the unique road construction problems that they encountered in the north. Permafrost, a permanently frozen layer of soil, would melt when uncovered, leaving a horrible swampy mess. After discovering the problems of permafrost, the engineers learned to insulate the frozen earth with a corduroy road, made from a layer of logs, dirt, and gravel, to keep the ground frozen.

Fig. 2.3 – Alaska Highway military tote road, 1942.
Stan Cohen, Alcan and Canol (Missoula, MT: Pictorial Histories Publishing Company, Inc., 1992), 52.

Bridge building was also problematic in the north. In the spring, rivers and streams began to thaw and became torrential currents of ice, plowing through anything in their paths, including bridge supports. Initially the crews built log trestle bridges, but

[28] Twichell, 83.

most needed to be rebuilt every spring. Many of the log bridges were later replaced with sturdier permanent steel bridges.[29]

In addition to the Alaska Highway, the U.S. government had several other construction projects ongoing in the Canadian northwest at the same time. The Canol pipeline project involved almost as many men and as much money as the highway project but did not receive nearly the publicity. The pipeline and accompanying road from Norman Wells, Northwest Territories, to Whitehorse was to provide fuel for the Northwest Staging Route, the highway, and Alaskan military forces. However, the pipeline saw hardly any use and was dismantled shortly after the war.[30] On the other hand, the Haines Highway, a road built to connect the Alaska Highway at Haines Junction, Yukon Territory, to the southeastern Alaska port of Haines, proved to be quite useful. It has been improved and is heavily used today by travelers cruising on the Alaska Marine Highway.[31]

Working at a frenetic pace, the U.S. Army pushed through a rough pioneer "tote" road in a little less than eight months. A ceremony commemorating this feat was held on November 20, 1942, at Soldier's Summit, on Kluane Lake. The road was hailed by various politicians, journalists, and military leaders as an amazing engineering feat and was even compared to the Panama Canal. However, the road was very rough and unsuitable for civilian traffic. In the wake of the Army Engineers, the U.S. Public Roads Administration (P.R.A.) had the task of straightening and smoothing out the pioneer road.

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[29] Cohen, The Trail of '42, 58.
[30] Coates and Morrison, 35-36.
[31] Coates and Morrison, 39-40.

While the Army Corps of Engineers has traditionally received the bulk of the credit and publicity for the Alaska Highway's construction, the Public Roads Administration's thousands of men and tons of equipment deserve as much attention for their efforts. The P.R.A., headed by Commissioner Thomas H. MacDonald, began its work at the same time as the Army engineers, with instructions to build a permanent, all-weather highway at higher standards than the hurried military "tote" road. Because of the differing standards of the two groups, the P.R.A.-built road sometimes varied from the army's route by as much as ten miles, as the P.R.A. went around rough terrain.[32]

Working under the Army's authority, the P.R.A. used equipment, buildings, and supplies from New Deal agencies, such as the Civilian Conservation Corps and the Works Projects Administration. Because of the magnitude of the highway project, the P.R.A. hired five large general contractors to oversee and hire smaller firms (47 during 1942 and 81 in 1943), who did the actual construction.[33] The logistics of the Public Roads Administration's operation was an accounting nightmare, but owing to the wartime importance of the project, P.R.A. spending went virtually unchecked until the end of the war.

The relationship between the Army and the P.R.A. was often tense as the Army downgraded its standards for the highway because the importance of the road to the war effort declined. In 1943, the Army's new directive for the P.R.A. was to build the civilian highway as close to the Army's route as possible and for the finished road to be

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[32] Heath Twichell, "Cut, Fill and Straighten: The Role of the Public Roads Administration in the Building of the Alaska Highway," in The Alaska Highway: Papers of the 40th Anniversary Symposium, 59.
[33] Twichell, "Cut, Fill and Straighten," 58.

narrower and of lower quality than originally ordered. Inferior materials for bridges and culverts resulted in the P.R.A.'s having to rebuild those sections, as they were continually destroyed by spring thaws, heavy rain, and mud slides.[34]

In October of 1943, the P.R.A. officially completed its work on the Alaska Highway. By November, only minimal crews remained along the highway to provide maintenance and to finish the last few incomplete bridges. The crews that remained consisted primarily of Canadians, supervised by P.R.A. engineers, as directed by the Army.[35] From the end of 1943 until the end of the war, the skeletal work crews did only very basic maintenance on the highway.

The U.S. had asked the Canadian government repeatedly through 1944 and 1945 to take responsibility for the highway early, but the Canadians stubbornly insisted on the original treaty date. The Alaska Highway had not been completed to the expectations given at the beginning of construction, and the Canadian government was not looking forward to the enormous burden that highway maintenance would bring.[36] Finally, six months after the end of World War II, in April 1946, the Alaska Highway was officially transferred to the Canadian government, according to the agreement. The Royal Canadian Army was given responsibility for the highway, not for defensive reasons, but so military engineers could hone their skills of bridge building and other facets of road construction.[37]

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[34] Coates, 146.
[35] Twichell, "Cut, Fill and Straighten," 62.
[36] Coates, 189-191.
[37] Ken S. Coates and William R. Morrison, Land of the Midnight Sun: A History of the Yukon (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005), 264.

With the end of World War II, Americans expected to be able to load up the family automobile and travel north over the Alaska Highway to explore the last frontier. So many stories had been told about the epic construction project that the public was eager to share the experience by visiting the Alaskan and northwest Canadian wilderness. The wartime literature, ranging from government publications to first-hand accounts to children's books, generally romanticized the Alaska Highway's construction and aroused the American pioneer spirit.

Chapter 3: Building the Myth

Introduction

The 1898 Klondike gold rush reassured the nation that there was still a frontier to be explored, where the American pioneer dream of making one's way in the wilderness could still be accomplished. The United States was in the midst of a depression in the 1890s and many Americans were desperate for work of any kind. News of the gold discovery motivated tens of thousands to rush north for adventure and the opportunity to succeed on the "last frontier." [1]

The events of the gold rush mesmerized the nation's southern populations, who read fascinating stories of adventure and hardship published in books, magazines, and newspapers. Many who read these exciting accounts of life in the North dreamed of having their own adventures in Alaska and the Yukon. The stories romanticized the hazards and discomforts of northern life to a nation hungry for distractions from the depression of the 1890s and everyday life.

In like manner, stories of the epic Alaska Highway construction project brought hope to a country frightened by the events of World War II and disheartened by the lengthy 1930s depression. Reports of U.S. Engineering troops carving a road out of the wilderness to supply the men fighting the "Japs" and protect North America from enemy invasion boosted the spirits of a concerned nation. The highway became a symbol of American ingenuity and perseverance, as well as a demonstration of American and

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[1] Melody Webb, The Last Frontier (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1985), 125.

Canadian solidarity.[2] While the military had many construction projects ongoing in the North during World War II, none captured the country's imagination like the Alaska Highway.

War Stories

Literature written during the war years was instrumental in romanticizing the construction of the Alaska Highway. Authors promoted the highway as a stupendous engineering feat and as a doorway to America's last frontier. For instance, even before the road's completion, Julius C. Edelstein, a political advisor to President Roosevelt, predicted the highway's greatness in his work, Alaska Comes of Age, written in 1942. Edelstein wrote:

> Engineers have dreamed of the Alaskan highway as they once dreamed of the Panama Canal. The idea of slicing a motor arterial through 1,200 miles of virgin mountain and forest is a project of imaginative quality. To link the great northern frontier with California, Oregon, Washington, British Columbia, and Alberta would be in a sense tantamount to the Union Pacific's feat in linking the Pacific coast of the United States with the Atlantic in the 1860's.[3]

Edelstein also contributed to the mythical status of Alaska Highway workers: "Engineering regiments, several of them all-Negro units, performed stupendous feats of labor. There were some delays, but the work went on despite summer heat and

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[2] Coates, 10.
[3] Julius C. Edelstein, Alaska Comes of Age (New York: American Council Institute of Pacific Relations, 1942), 50.

carnivorous mosquitoes."[4] He ended his work casting the North as the "new frontier" and a new Alaska as "full of possibilities, and proud of a front-rank role in national defense and in national affairs."[5]

Another issue that war-time writers often raised was the importance of the Alaska Highway in protecting the U.S. from Japanese invasion. Japan's attack on and occupation of the Aleutian Islands petrified Americans, as they feared the Japanese would move south. The Alaska Highway would allow for U.S. troops to reach the North and stop the "Japs." In his work, Alaskan Backdoor to Japan, British author Philip Paneth credited highway construction for stopping the Japanese, writing: "The Allies have already shown their unwillingness to see Japan advance without some steps to curb her. One mighty step is the building of the new Highway, into which the Americans threw themselves with characteristic zeal and refusal to acknowledge any obstacles."[6]

Written in 1943 from the perspective of a very enthusiastic Englishman during the height of World War II, Alaskan Backdoor to Japan advanced the strategic significance of the highway and Alaska from the beginning to the end of the work. Author Paneth, writing in epic manner, incited his readers to believe that the Alaska Highway endeavor was both stirring and patriotic:

> The History of the Highway is a thrilling story of a great road driven at top speed through the wilds of an almost unknown country – a country which has called so many people to dreams of fortune – and to disappointment.

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[4] Edelstein, 53.
[5] Edelstein, 61-62.
[6] Philip Paneth, Alaskan Backdoor to Japan (London: Alliance Press Ltd., 1943), 143.

> ... It is the story of a great nation and epoch and one which will live forever in the pages of history. A vast American territory, isolated from any overland approach since its discovery, has now, in an amazingly short space of time had its back door opened to a world fighting for existence. A road to victory has been made where our enemies least expected it.[7]

This sort of writing was bound to excite Americans and promote interest in the highway and the construction process. The Alaska Highway's romantic image grew from the poetic and provocative opinions of writers such as Paneth.

The epitome of romantic Alaska Highway literature written during World War II would have to be Philip Godsell's The Romance of the Alaska Highway. Godsell's work, written in 1944, overflowed with poignant descriptions and grand statements that incited pride in the American pioneer spirit, as in this moving quote:

> Faced with the threat of Asiatic invasion Uncle Sam's parlor clad (sic) engineers and doughboys swung into action, to engrave on the scroll of Time a saga of ingenuity and engineering skill which has few counterparts in history. For the story of the Alaska Highway is one of vision and conception magnificent in scope, and of enterprise equally grand in accomplishment.[8]

Fanciful and creative narration fill the pages of Godsell's book, for example, "The wilderness through which these doughty (sic) boys toiled and sweated beneath broiling suns was a dark, forbidding panorama of everlasting forest, pierced here and there by

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[7] Paneth, 7-8.
[8] Philip H. Godsell, The Romance of the Alaska Highway (Toronto: The Ryserson Press, 1944), 1-2.

bejeweled lakes that mirrored an azure sky, the flaming pyrotechnics of sub-Arctic sunset and the diamond-drenched violet of approaching night."[9]

Several pieces of children's literature written during the war years also extolled the value of the Alaska Highway, as well as adding to the highway's mythical stature. Douglas Coe's 1943 book, Road to Alaska, with lovely little drawings by Winfield Scott Hoskins, began by explaining the importance of roads throughout history and then related the history of the Alaska Highway's construction by the Army Engineer Corps. Sprinkled throughout the work are snippets of Alaska history, beginning with Seward's purchase of Alaska in 1867, which emphasized Alaska's remoteness and added to the drama of the highway's construction. The final sentence memorialized the road-builders: "And, just as roads last for centuries, so the story of their ingenuity, their endurance and their courage will live on and on, a stirring chapter in the American legend."[10]

Similarly, Hello Alaska, a picture book written by Sarah Litchfield and illustrated by Kurt Wiese, illustrated the importance of the Alaska Highway as a critical new transportation link and legendary construction project. Written in 1945, the author emphasized to her young readers that post-war Alaska would be much different because of the military construction projects. She wrote:

> Airways and highways of war will become airways and highways of opportunity. Many an American will consider seriously the last great frontier belonging to the United States now that transportation has been

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[9] Godsell, 162-163.
[10] Douglas Coe and Winfield Scott Hoskins, illus., Road to Alaska: The Story of the Alaska Highway (New York: Julian Messner, Inc., 1943), 175.

> made easier. An Alaska-bound traveler of the future will be visiting a land with a promising future, instead of a snow-bound world formerly almost cut off from anywhere.[11]

Litchfield left her young readers with the impression that post-war Alaska would be an accessible American frontier and that the North would be civilized, as opposed to its implied present state of untamed wilderness.

The U.S. federal government also recognized the economic potential that the Alaska Highway could bring to the North if it capitalized on the highway's epic construction. In 1944, the U.S. Department of the Interior and the National Park Service published a study entitled Recreational Resources of the Alaska Highway and Other Roads in Alaska. The study anticipated a surge of tourists up the Alaska Highway after the war's end, as explained on the first page of the first chapter:

> No other activity connected with the Territory in recent years has been publicized as has the Alaska Highway. Press releases to the newspapers have detailed the difficulties surmounted by engineer troops; scientific articles have covered the part played by the Public Roads Administration and its accessory contractors; thousands of persons have parts of the saga of the Highway from fathers or brothers, sweethearts or friends, who have fought muskeg with engineer troops or ridden the bucking tractors of contractors. The Highway has been glamorized. It is safe to say that, at one time or another, the owners of at least a quarter of the more than

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[11] Sarah Litchfield and Kurt Wiese, illus., Hello Alaska (Chicago: Albert Whitman and Co., 1945), 32.

> twenty million passenger automobiles in the States have dallied with thoughts of taking the much-publicized trip to Alaska within the next few years after the war.[12]

The study proposed that roadhouses and other services should be standardized and that the government should control what further accommodations and recreational facilities might be built along the highway. The government planners put forth ideas for an elaborate facility at the Alaska-Yukon border, carefully spaced roadside overnight stops, and well-designed and informative scenic pull-offs. In addition, the study included a "Plan for an Alaskan Community,"[13] a carefully designed plan for a small town to be constructed at the junction of major highways, such as Tok or Delta Junction. The writers of the study realized that the Alaska Highway had a strong frontier attraction to the American public, who would be expecting a basic level of services as they traveled North.

In 1945, the House of Representatives Committee on Roads composed an interim report on the Alaska Highway, which was published in 1946 by the U.S. government printing office. Members of the Committee either drove or flew over the entire highway and made inspections along the route, so they had no illusions concerning the quality of the road. In addition to the basic facts and numbers in the report, the Committee also contributed to the romance of the highway's construction, such as in the following passage:

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[12] U.S. Dept. of the Interior and National Park Service, Recreational Resources of the Alaska Highway and Other Roads in Alaska (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1944), 1.
[13] Recreational Resources of the Alaska Highway, 58.

> The construction of the Alaska Highway and its feeder facilities by the Corps of Engineers and the private construction firms operating under the direct supervision of the P.R.A. constitutes one of the construction epics of modern times. It was a gigantic task performed under great pressure where the elements of nature put man and machine to the ultimate test of performance.[14]

The Committee predicted a profitable future for Alaska and Canada's northwest due to the Alaska Highway, writing: "Now with a completed highway traversing this rich and hitherto unexplored area, one of the last of our pioneer areas on the North American Continent is made accessible to those with sturdy constitutions and vision."[15] Again, the American pioneer dream was promoted, but in this instance, with the added endorsement of U.S. Congressmen.

While a congressional report certainly influenced some Americans to dream of a journey over the frontier Alaska Highway, it is probable that many more Americans were reading the exciting first-person accounts of those who traveled to Alaska during the war and published their observations. These included Jean Potter's Alaska Under Arms, written in 1942. On assignment to Alaska for Fortune magazine, Potter observed the uniqueness of Alaskans, remarking that "Once Alaska 'gets' you, the saying goes, you are sure to return. Enthusiasm for the country runs so strong that it nearly amounts to a cult."[16] She also observed that "Alaskans are alert, patriotic Americans, with a peculiar

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[14] House, Alaska Highway: An Interim Report from the Committee on Roads, House of Representatives, pursuant to H. Res. 255, 79th Congress, 2nd Session, 1946, 12.
[15] House of Rep. Interim Report, 63.
[16] Jean Potter, Alaska Under Arms (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1942), 120.

frontier psychology all their own."[17] Potter's main theme was to show the war's effect on Alaskan development, but she also wrote of Alaska's bright future when "it will come completely into its own, accorded recognition as a powerful, magnificent country."[18]

Author Joseph Driscoll visited Alaska during World War II as an assignment for the New York Herald Tribune. In his book, War Discovers Alaska, published in 1943, Driscoll often criticized the United States' ignorance and neglect of the territory: "Not until Hirohito pushed open the door and snatched at the forsaken waif did we decide that Cinderella meant something to us and was prize to fight for."[19]

Driscoll had an interesting theory about the impetus for the Alaska Highway's construction. He laid much of the blame for the tardiness of the northern road's construction on the Canadians, explaining:

> Why was it that the Alaskan highway was not begun until after Pearl Harbor, although its peacetime value has been recognized for years? Simply because the Canadian government felt that until we were actively engaged in war we would not throw enough men into Alaska to keep the Japanese from making use of such a highway. The Canadians felt, and rightly so, that the uncut forest primeval and the unpaved tundra and the snowed-in mountain passes afforded more protection than a motor highway, unless that highway were guarded by the whole might of the United States.[20]

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[17] Potter, ix.
[18] Potter, 194.
[19] Joseph Driscoll, War Discovers Alaska (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Co., 1943), 15.
[20] Driscoll, 21.

Unsubstantiated comments such as these, read by the average American with only limited prior knowledge, if any, of the Alaska Highway story, would on occasion promote misleading highway folklore or legend. For instance, even today there are those who believe the highway was built in such a winding fashion to make it more difficult for enemy planes to bomb the road. The truth is that the road was very poorly surveyed, and in many places not surveyed at all, before construction began. The bulldozers often simply followed the path of least resistance. In this particular case, it is unknown who started the winding road myth.[21]

A female Canadian journalist, Gertrude Baskine, advertised herself as "The first woman to receive a military permit to cover overland the Alaska Military Highway while it was still under construction"[22] on the title page of her book, Hitch-Hiking the Alaska Highway. A head-strong woman, Baskine chose to travel the highway after being told repeatedly that it was impossible. Her work was an effusion of fabulous imagery that romanticized the Alaska Highway, particularly the workers, from beginning to end. Before the first page of her first chapter, Baskine's acknowledgement set the tone for the rest of the book:

> May we who knew the Alaska Military Highway – the old Alcan in the making – never forget the fortitude that not only curbed its unruly rivers and tamed its epic wilderness but forged and welded a mass of people who met, worked, lived together and developed a fraternal spirit such as would

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[21] William R. Hunt, Passage to the North (Harrisburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1992), 8-9.
[22] Gertrude Baskine, Hitch-Hiking the Alaska Highway (Toronto: The MacMillan Co. of Canada Ltd., 1944), iii.

> have made the urgency of this historic Road unnecessary had it been on a world-wide scale.[23]

Baskine's book was a memoir of her travels from Edmonton to Fairbanks, and along the way, she found something good to say about practically everyone she met. However, she saved the bulk of her praise for the workers, both male and the few females, portraying them as heroic and selfless, even writing that they came north, not for money, rather for "a spirit of adventure, a desire for new fields, or a widening of their horizons."[24]

Throughout her book, Baskine's emotional writing contributed to the Alaska Highway frontier myth and built up the road as the key to great pioneering opportunities and even as the key to a better world. Baskine wrote that the workers "had hoped in carving this route to carve also the means to a better tomorrow, to a life of real liberty – greater plenitude, leisure and happiness for themselves and for their children. And not for themselves alone, but for the whole world."[25]

Herbert Lanks also wrote a first-person account of his journey over the Alaska Highway during the war. In Highway to Alaska, Lanks recounted his 1943 trip from New York to Alaska and back over three and a half months. Lanks and his companion traveled in an army Willys Jeep with a small trailer and had permits from Washington, D.C., that give them the status of war correspondents. They had permission to stay at army and P.R.A. construction camps along the highway, which gave the reader the impression that there would be plenty of accommodations for Alaska Highway travelers

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[23] Baskine, vii.
[24] Baskine, 65.
[25] Baskine, 316.

after the war. Lanks also gave the reader the expectation that the highway would be an easy drive after the war, as he suggested that any rough spots he traversed would be repaired by the P.R.A. before war's end. The author wrote: "To the tourist of to-day, driving through this section which cost us so much in toil and sweat, the finished road will mean little but pleasure."[26]

While Lanks' writing was a bit less grandiose than Baskine's, he was no less adept at romanticizing the highway's construction and those who worked on it, as in this praise: "Their record is as glorious as that of any combat unit on the fighting front, for here, too, men suffered and died in a battle of the wilderness so that America might be safe."[27] Lanks further promoted the Alaska Highway as an engineering and diplomatic wonder, such as in this description of the Peace River Bridge:

> We looked up at the long, gray, steel-and-concrete achievement and thought it a fine monument to Canadian and American cooperation and good-will. Up to the present time the Peace River had been the greatest single obstacle to the northern migration, but with the building of the bridge, a great transportation artery began to feed the north country.[28]

Lanks' descriptions and praise of the highway contributed to the frontier mythology of the road and encouraged readers to dream of an Alaska Highway adventure. But the final sentences of Lanks' book were surely the decisive lure to the American frontier spirit. He wrote: "We had pioneered from the east coast of the United States to Alaska and

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[26] Herbert C. Lanks, Highway to Alaska (New York: D. Appleton-Century Co., 1944), 185.
[27] Lanks, 24.
[28] Lanks, 27.

returned by motor vehicle. We had been away three and a half months and had covered some 13,000 miles. It is a great trip for an American."[29]

Books and government publications were not the only media forms that romanticized the Alaska Highway during its construction. Many magazine and newspaper articles were published, with titles such as "Alaska Highway: An Engineering Epic," featured in the February 1943 edition of National Geographic Magazine.[30] The movie industry responded with such feature films as Alaska Highway, starring Richard Arlen and Jean Parker, and filmed by Paramount Studios in 1943. The picture was advertised with the tag line, "Bullets vs. Bulldozers . . . On the Road That Stopped the Japs."[31]

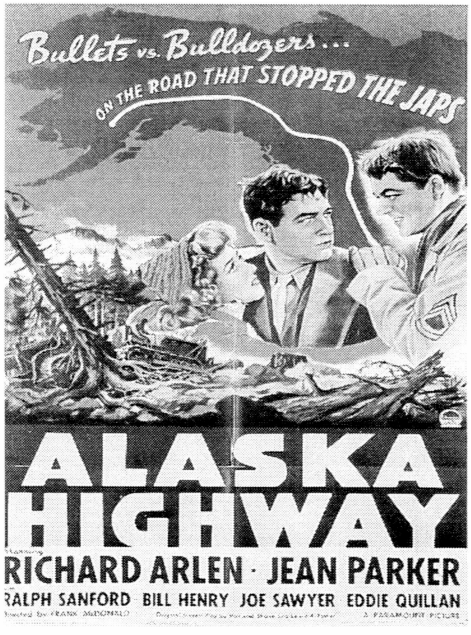

Fig. 3.1 – 1943 poster for the feature film Alaska Highway.
Stan Cohen, Alcan and Canol (Missoula, MT: Pictorial Histories Publishing Company, Inc., 1992), vi.

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[29] Lanks, 190.
[30] Froelich Rainey, "Alaska Highway: An Engineering Epic," National Geographic Magazine (Feb. 1943): 143-168.
[31] Alaska Highway movie poster in Cohen, Alcan and Canol, vi.

World War II product advertising also capitalized on the Alaska Highway, for instance in a 1943 Life magazine advertisement for Studebaker trucks, which read:

> Hundreds upon hundreds of huge, multiple-drive Studebaker trucks are rumbling over the wild, rugged route of the great new 1610-mile Alaska-Canada highway. More of these big Studebakers are in service on this amazing military road than any other make of truck. And despite temperatures that often drop far below zero, Studebaker stamina is getting the cargoes of vital supplies through to our important North Pacific theater of war.[32]

Studebaker's ad featured a line of large trucks driving through deep snow past heavily clothed highway workers, who smiled and waved cheerily at the passing vehicles. The picture suggested to the viewer that traveling over the Alaska Highway would be a wonderful adventure, particularly in a Studebaker truck.

Conclusion

Thus the stories of the Alaska Highway that reached the American public during the course of World War II tended to romanticize the road's construction and inspired dreams of traveling north for a frontier adventure. Unfortunately, the public's information about the highway was often incomplete or unrealistic. Military censorship left books and articles about the highway vague concerning the highway's condition. Because of military restrictions, civilian travel over the highway was prohibited, except

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[32] Advertisement, Life (March 29, 1943): 2.

by special permit.[33] Consequently, the Alaska Highway's accessibility was often misrepresented.

The American public had the impression that a civilian-quality, all-weather road to Alaska had been built. Americans believed that they could jump in the family car and go north as soon as the war was over and war-time restrictions were lifted. The Canadian government knew that Americans had these expectations of traveling the highway, but they also knew that the road had not been completed to the civilian standards originally promised. For these reasons, the Canadian government was in no hurry to assume responsibility for the road any earlier than absolutely required.

Regardless of the road's condition, it did finally connect Alaska and the Yukon with the rest of the United States and Canada. As Gertrude Baskine, in Hitch-Hiking the Alaska Highway intoned:

> And all the people who insist on telling me that it is made up of impassable holes, impassable stretches of water, impassable bridges and impassable mountains – in other words, that there is no Road – please read this. THE HIGHWAY IS THERE.[34]

Baskine's words were exactly what the American public wanted to read. The mythology of the Alaska Highway had been established, and many Americans were ready to exercise their frontier spirit and head north after the war for an unparalled wilderness adventure.

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[33] Coates and Morrison, The Alaska Highway in World War II, 213.
[34] Baskine, 310.

Chapter 4: After the War, 1946-1963

Introduction

Six months after the end of World War II, the Alaska Highway was officially transferred from the United States to Canada in a pompous ceremony in Whitehorse on April 1, 1946. Considerably less excitement surrounded this event than the celebration held for the highway's official opening, but bands played and officials from both countries gave speeches and shook hands. From Dawson Creek, British Columbia, to the Alaska border, the highway became Canada's responsibility.[1]

The Canadian military would be responsible for the highway's upkeep until 1964. While the Canadian army had to confront all of the same problems that plagued the U.S. engineers (cold weather, permafrost, spring floods, and muskeg, for instance), the Canadians had less money, fewer workers, and older equipment to maintain the highway. Consequently, maintenance of the road was stressed and improvements would be minimal.[2]

During the last years of World War II, the highway had been kept off limits to most civilians, ostensibly for military reasons. After the Canadian take-over of the road, the highway remained closed to civilians, with a few exceptions. The Alaska Highway had not been completed to pre-construction specifications and the Canadian military felt there were not enough amenities, such as filling stations, motels, and auto repair shops,

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[1] Coates, 195.
[2] Remley, 184-185.

for civilian travelers along the road.[3] For this reason, the Canadian government decided to continue using the U.S. military's permit system. In addition to the permits, obtained in Edmonton, civilians also had to stop at two control stations, one at Dawson Creek and one at Whitehorse.[4] The government also required those who did acquire permits to bring enough spare equipment to be prepared for any mishap. Besides the usual spare tires, tools, and jack, the Alaska Highway driver needed to bring along an extra distributor coil and points, condenser, clutch parts, generator parts, and even a spare axle.[5]

Although people managed to get through on the highway, many American travelers complained to the Canadian government about the restrictions of the permit system. Finally on February 11, 1948, civilian travel restrictions were lifted with government officials hoping for a bevy of new roadside development as a result.[6] And as they had hoped, small towns along the highway, such as Tok and Fort Nelson, began to grow, benefiting from the increase in travelers. Ambitious individuals remodeled military and civilian construction camps into roadhouses.[7] The Canadian government's Department of Mines and Resources in the Yukon Territory built public campgrounds in an effort to keep people from camping on the side of the road and starting fires.[8] Amenities slowly improved in quantity and quality.

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[3] Richard J. Diubaldo, "The Alaska Highway in Canada-United States Relations," in The Alaska Highway: Papers of the 40th Anniversary Symposium," 113.
[4] Betty Boyd, "An Auto Trip Along the Alaska Highway," in Alaska Magazine (May 1947): 11 and 38.
[5] Cole, et al., Alaska or Bust, 35.
[6] Coates and Morrison, The Alaska Highway in World War II, 223.
[7] Jane Haigh, The Alaska Highway: A Historical Photographic Journey (Whitehorse: Wolf Creek Books, Inc., 2001), 12-13.
[8] Coates and Morrison, The Alaska Highway in World War II, 224.

After the Canadian government discontinued the permit system in 1948, Americans from all walks of life undertook the Alaska Highway journey. Canadian historian Ken Coates explained: "The people traveling along the highway varied tremendously – American servicemen heading to Alaska, hunters and fishermen looking for northern adventure, tourists retracing either the Trail of '98 or reliving the adventures of 1942."[9] In addition there were Americans who headed north hoping to homestead or find employment and start new lives on the last frontier.[10]

Regardless of why the travelers ventured north, they came with many expectations of the journey, garnered from war-time publications, such as Herbert Lanks' Highway to Alaska and Gertrude Baskine's Hitch-Hiking the Alaska Highway.[11] The highway's mystique had been established by these and other works, and Americans were eager to experience the accessible frontier offered by a drive up the Alaska Highway. Stories of incredible scenic beauty and abundant wildlife lured travelers up the highway and away from their familiar civilized lives. Many would later write and publish stories about their highway travels, which furthered the myth and romance of the road and enticed others to follow.

Travel Guide Books

With the completion of World War II, residents of Alaska and northern Canada anticipated an influx of tourists who would boost the northern economy. To encourage and aid the prospective visitor in planning a northern vacation, individuals, businesses,

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[9] Coates, 221.
[10] Remley, 187.
[11] Coates, 211.

and government agencies began producing travel guides. These informative publications ranged in size from simple pamphlets to books of several hundred pages. They included such information as what sites to visit, hunting and fishing regulations, possible accommodations, and transportation suggestions.

Possibly the first of these post-war publications, Lou Jacobin's Guide to Alaska and the Yukon began its twenty-five year history in 1946. In his introduction, Jacobin explained the book's creation, writing: "The idea for this publication was outlined first at a special meeting of Skagway's Chamber of Commerce. That group of public-spirited citizens gave the plan a nod. So it was there, on the Klondike 'Trail of '98,' that this Tourist's and Sportsmen's *Guide to Alaska* was born."[12] Throughout Jacobin's guide, the articles, photographs, and advertisements attempted to lure the vacationer north with the theme of exploring the last frontier but, at the same time, showing that Alaska's towns and cities had all the modern conveniences.

Because the Canadian government still restricted civilian traffic on the Alaska Highway in 1946, Jacobin's guide book had only one page of information about the road, but it began with a short statement romanticizing the highway's construction: "The Alaska Highway, built by GI's at record-breaking speed as a war emergency through more than 1500 miles of Canadian and Alaskan wilderness..."[13] The page included up-to-date highway information provided by a civilian driver that encouraged the prospective traveler, despite the Canadian restrictions. Jacobin wrote:

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[12] Lou Jacobin, Jacobin's Guide to Alaska and the Yukon (Juneau: Alaska Tourist Guide Co., 1946), 5.
[13] Jacobin, 11.

> . . . reports from those who have recently motored over the Alaska Highway are encouraging. R.J. Bowers, with his wife, daughter and son-in-law, are among motorists who have made the trip this year and are enthusiastic in their praise, not only of the condition of the road but of the courteous treatment of Canadian officials all along the route from Edmonton to Whitehorse.[14]

Mr. Bowers and his family traveled in April 1946 and made the journey from Seattle to Fairbanks in nine days. They reported their total expenses to be $213.47 for the more than 3,043 mile trip and explained that to obtain a highway travel permit in Edmonton "your car must be in first-class mechanical condition and equipped with sufficient spare tires, tubes, gas, etc., and overnight camping outfit."[15] The Bowers did not report any problems on the journey, leading the reader to surmise that anyone with a decent vehicle and the appropriate supplies could drive to Alaska.

The year 1949 saw the introduction of what would become a necessity for Alaska Highway travelers to the present day. The first Milepost was published as a small booklet, with an attached map of roads to and around Alaska, and sold for $1.00. Bill Wallace, the creator of The Milepost, recognized that some sort of guidebook would be useful for those traveling the Alaska Highway to locate services and accommodations.[16]

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[14] Jacobin, 11.
[15] Jacobin, 11.
[16] William A. Wallace, "The Birth of The Milepost," in Alaska Geographic: Adventure Roads North, Vol. 10, no. 1 (1983): 50-51.

In 1983, Wallace wrote: "The Milepost has flourished and grown and has become part of the unfolding destiny of the vast northwest American and Canadian wilderness."[17]

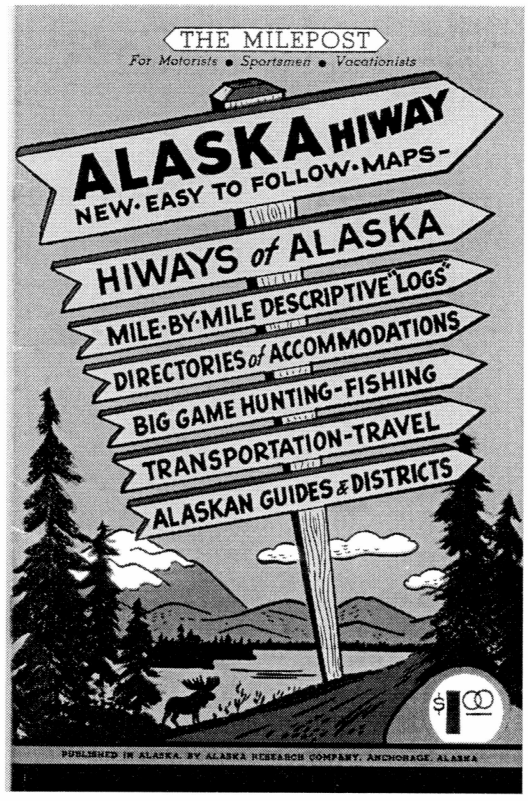

Fig. 4.1 – Cover of the 1949 edition of The Milepost.
Wm. A. Wallace, ed., The Milepost, 1st edition (Anchorage: Alaska Research Company, 1949), front cover.

In its first edition, The Milepost provided the northern traveler with mile by mile descriptions of scenery, services, and historic trivia. But The Milepost also provided a romantic description of the Alaska Highway's construction and purpose.

> Since that bitterly cold predawn hour in March, 1942, when the vanguard of the U.S. Corps of Engineers arrived with their equipment at the "end of

[17] Wallace, 51.

> steel" at the then tiny frontier village of Dawson Creek the Alaska Highway has become a legend in the annals of roadbuilding. For years only a dream of far-sighted engineers of the north country, the present-day reality of the Alaska Highway is rapidly becoming an important artery of commerce and travel – a link between the industrial regions of the U.S. and the fabulous natural resources of Alaska, a great trade route penetrating the incredible riches of northwestern Canada's wilderness, and a permanent monument to the friendship between two great nations.[18]

The highway was promoted as a great engineering marvel and a door to economic treasures, but the 1949 Milepost further portrayed the towns along the highway as beneficiaries of the highway's success. For instance, the book stated: "With the renewed and greatly increased interest in the North, and with the Alaska Highway trip a 'must' on the programs of motorists for years to come, Whitehorse has a future as assured and economically sound as that of the great north land of which it is a vital part."[19]

Other Alaska Highway road guides appeared in the following years, but none developed the following or reputation of The Milepost. However, all of the guides emphasized that an Alaska Highway journey was a terrific frontier adventure that all Americans were capable of accomplishing as long as they prepared properly. Advice was given to cover fuel tanks with rubber sheets, headlights with grills, and windshields with plexiglass. To alleviate the dust problems encountered on the highway, many travel guides advised closing all the windows and turning the heater fan on high to "pressurize"

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[18] Wm. A. Wallace, ed., The Milepost, 1st edition (Anchorage: Alaska Research Co., 1949), 9.
[19] The Milepost, 25.

the interior of the vehicle.[20] These precautions became part of the road's adventure lore that exists even today as evidenced by the many Alaska Highway travelers with protective coverings over their headlights and windshields.

Highway Stories

Between 1946 and 1964, previously written highway literature provided inspiration and highway travel guides provided direction to countless Americans eager to drive north. In turn, many of these travelers returned to their homes all over the country and felt compelled to write about their own Alaska Highway adventures. While it could not be said that there was a flood of post-war travelers on the Alaska Highway, those who did make the journey often promoted their trips as great frontier experiences.

Besides providing a route for Americans to drive to the north, the highway also made it possible for Alaskans to return to the south. Alaskan George Hayden traveled the highway in November 1946. In addition to being one of the earliest civilians to drive the road, Hayden had several unique experiences. Hayden traveled in winter, and he began his trip in Anchorage, Alaska, with a destination of Los Angeles, California. Driving the highway south from Alaska meant that Hayden was not required to have a permit from the Canadian government. From this interesting perspective, Hayden wrote and self-published his Alaska Road Log in 1947. Basically a small pamphlet, the work was a succinct journal of Hayden's journey down the highway with his wife, two small

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[20] Alaska and the Alaska Highway, 1961-62 edition (Washington D.C.: American Automobile Association, 1961), 15.

children, friend, and a dog in an overloaded 1941 Ford station wagon. Hayden had high hopes for the Alaska Highway and dedicated his small work to the "Rush of '47'."[21]

Promotion of the Alaska Highway also occurred in books written by other Alaskans. For instance, Emil Goulet came to Alaska by ship in 1931 and was influenced to write a book about his "wilderness experiences" after friends said that "they would like to know more about those rugged frontier years."[22] In his 1949 book, Rugged Years on the Alaska Frontier, Goulet applauded the Alaska Highway's construction as a way to open up the north to opportunity.[23] Later, Goulet and his wife decided to return to the States. He wrote:

> With our property sold, and nothing but a few household items and carpenter tools left, we planned our trip back to the States. The most reasonable route for us to take seemed to be to drive our truck out over the Military Highway, for we could take what belongings we had and, at the same time, have the privilege and satisfaction of having gone over the Alcan as well.[24]

Goulet called his impending trip south "our next great adventure" and maybe "the greatest one yet."[25] These sorts of comments provided more incentive to readers to travel the highway for their own adventure.

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[21] George Hayden, Alaska Road Log: Covering Twenty-Five Days on the Alaska Highway (Anchorage: self-published, 1947), 1.
[22] Emil Oliver Goulet, Rugged Years on the Alaska Frontier (Philadelphia: Dorrance and Co., 1949), vi.
[23] Goulet, 275-276.
[24] Goulet, 281.
[25] Goulet, 288.

Alaska resident Sara Machetanz's 1954 book, Where Else But Alaska? began with the author arriving by plane in the small Alaskan village of Unalakleet to marry her fiancé, Fred. After a year in the Far North, they returned to the States, by airplane and boat, to go on the lecture circuit for a year. The following April, they decided to return to Alaska by driving up the Alaska Highway. Machetanz wrote that the highway horror stories she had heard had been misleading:

> The Alaska Highway began wide, well-graveled with deep drainage ditches on either side. Our initial impression and one that proved correct was that the hazards of the trip had been highly exaggerated. There were stretches where the surface was washboardy and there were seasonal frost boils and some pot holes but nothing that remotely approached danger if one exercised judgment in speed. Depending upon immediate conditions we drove up to fifty miles an hour, yet others could and did go faster. The worst feature by far was the ever present dust but one could overlook this with magnificent scenery at every turn."[26]

While Machetanz gave her readers the impression that the highway driving experience was not difficult, she also remarked, upon reaching the Alaska portion of the road: "It was on this stretch we experienced one of the biggest thrills of driving the Alcan. We came to pavement."[27]

Tales of Alaska Highway journeys by Alaskans may have seemed more reliable to the prospective traveler than those written by non-Northerners, but many of the State-side

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[26] Sara Machetanz, Where Else But Alaska? (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1954), 107.
[27] Machetanz, 131.

writers were very entertaining. In addition, stories written by ordinary Americans driving north in the family sedan demonstrated that an Alaska Highway journey was truly an accessible adventure.

Many such stories were written in the 1950s by housewives chronicling their families' adventures. Modern Pioneering in Alaska, written by Margaret Melin in 1954, concerns a family of four from Illinois who decided to take their dream vacation of driving to Alaska. The story was told by the wife and mother, who explained: "To us, living in Rockford, Illinois, Alaska seemed to be the 'utter end of the world.'"[28] After turning their 1951 Ford station wagon into a camper and packing the car to the roof (and on the roof), they were finally ready for their northern adventure. Melin wrote:

> ...with "Fairbanks or Bust" stickers glued on the front bumper and back window, we departed from Rockford touched with a tinge of apprehension as to what shape we and the car would be in upon our return. Substituting all doubts and misgivings about any dangers that might be in store for us with our carefree and happy thoughts, we embarked.[29]

The Melin family completed their Alaska vacation in just over a month with very few problems. They enjoyed their scenic surroundings and had a relaxing journey, free from the pressures and time restraints of city life. The author explained: "According to the calendar, today dawned as Thursday, but we had completely lost all track of days of the week. Each was simply another day and held its new, entrancing adventures for us."[30]

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[28] Margaret Melin, Modern Pioneering in Alaska (New York: Pageant Press, 1954), 1.
[29] Melin, 7-8.
[30] Melin, 36.

Frances Williams' husband worked on the Alaskan portion of the highway and drove the road many times. He was eager to share his experiences with Williams and, in 1952, the opportunity arose for the pair to travel from Seattle, Washington, to Anchorage, Alaska, and back over the highway. In her book, I Asked For It, Williams described their adventures, not recommending the trip for the weak or unprepared. She appealed to the frontier spirit of her reader, writing:

> At last I was in the Yukon that I had heard so much about – the Yukon trail! And with it came a stillness one could almost hear. When on a hill overlooking the treetops, it looked like a vast, snowy wilderness of untamed country – and it was just that! No sign of habitation, black and forbidding in appearance, yet a wondrous sight.[31]

Williams also perpetuated one of the highway's lasting myths, by asserting that the Peace River Bridge was constructed from the remains of "Galloping Gertie," a famous bridge that had once crossed the Tacoma Narrows in Washington State.[32] This rumor continues to circulate but is completely groundless.[33]

The Harris family made the decision to drive the Alaska Highway in 1950 to "share as a family unit an experience that promised release from the routine that had so long imprisoned our adventurous spirit."[34] Mae Evans Harris' book, You Can Alcan, is the story of an ordinary suburban family of four who wanted to live out the American

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[31] Frances Williams, I Asked For It (Philadelphia: Dorrance and Co., 1954), 35.
[32] Williams, 31.
[33] Coates, 206.
[34] Mae Evans Harris, You Can Alcan (Middlebury, VA: Denlingers, 1959), 10.

pioneer dream of heading out into the unknown frontier. While she was determined to go on the highway trip, Harris was also nervous about the unknown:

> An abrupt turn in the road made us forget our minor differences, for before us lay a vista of indescribable splendor; yet, as is so often the case in the Canadian Rockies, a view that installed a chill of forbearing. Again I was struck by the feeling that we four were alone and defenseless in a endless wilderness and that we should turn back before disaster struck us.[35]

Not only did Harris and her family not turn back, but they enjoyed their Alaska Highway adventure so much that they drove up and down the road twice more over the next five years. Those reading the Harris story would surely feel that the highway experience was within the reach of any typical American family, especially given that Mrs. Harris managed to wear high heels on every trip north. She explained: "I had brought no low-heeled shoes on the trip, for, as on our previous journey to Alaska, I preferred to dress as I ordinarily did at home in Washington."[36]

The Trail-R-Club of America published books for several years that advised trailer owners on traveling to Alaska. Their 1960 version of Trailering to Alaska consisted of travel information from government tourist agencies and reprints of articles about the highway from trailering magazines. In the introduction, the editor, R.H. Nulsen, stated: "To give the prospective adventurer the advantage of the experience of others, we have selected some of the outstanding articles on this subject and reprinted

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[35] Harris, 27.
[36] Harris, 57.

them in this volume."[37] In the chapter "Facts About the Alaska Trip," Nulsen added to the highway's romance, while downplaying the hazards:

> The Alaska Highway is a magnificent engineering feat. It was built by the U.S. Army Engineers during the early 40's to provide a war time route to Alaska. 1523 miles of highway were hewn out of the wilderness in less than two years. It winds through dense forests, mountains, valleys and over hundreds of streams and rivers. The road is kept in excellent condition by the Canadian Government. So, although you may be wheeling through rugged territory far from civilization you will have no trouble pulling your travel trailer which has been engineered for just such trips.[38]

While Nulsen's facts were a bit fuzzy, he did convey the highway's importance as an engineering feat and the idea that traveling the road would be a wilderness adventure.

The bulk of the book consisted of five magazine articles reprinted from previous years' trailering magazines. One of the articles concerned itself only with advice on what to bring and where to stop on the highway; one had very little about the highway, instead focusing on time spent in Alaska; and a third was basically an advertisement for Marvel Mobile Homes and Park in Fairbanks. However, the remaining two stories conveyed the spirit of adventure typical of an Alaska Highway journey.

Freda Austin, author of "Traveling the Alcan," wrote that her husband had worked on the Alcan with the 93rd Engineers and wanted to go back for a visit. She

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[37] R.H. Nulsen, ed., Trailering to Alaska (Beverly Hills, CA: Trail-R-Club of America, 1960), 5.
[38] Nulsen, 8-9.

expressed fear and nervousness about undertaking the trip from their home in New Mexico, particularly because she usually did all the driving and they would be towing their brand new 16 foot trailer, "Shadow." Austin had very few problems on her drive up and down the highway, and with amazing confidence in the steady improvement of the highway, wrote: "It is estimated that by 1960 the 1500 miles of the Alaska Highway will be paved! No more adventures, just whiz by the interesting spots of the road as we do in the states now. ...I'm so glad we made the trip before this may happen."[39] The highway was not paved by 1960, however; it was not completely paved until 1992. But the ruggedness of the gravel road merely added to its rustic pioneer image.

In "Texas to Alaska," Florence Randell related that her family has been warned against trailering to Alaska, but the Randall family decided to go anyway, as the father of the group had been employed to teach a summer course at the University of Alaska. The author explained:

> Ignoring such brutal warnings, our family of seven left the Texas Panhandle in a 1957 Ford station wagon and 15-foot trailer to explore the vast regions of the far, far northwest. This challenging land of extremes, where anything can and does happen, proved to be a thrill of a lifetime.[40]

Randall advised her readers that "The most important single item to carry in the car is a copy of The Milepost"[41] and not to be discouraged from driving the Alaska Highway.

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[39] Freda D. Austin, "Traveling the Alcan," in Trailering to Alaska, 91.
[40] Florence Randall, "Texas to Alaska," in Trailering to Alaska, 108.
[41] Randall, 109.

Instead, she reminded them that "By harmonizing with nature, this can be one of the most thrilling adventures of your life."[42]

Conclusion

Between 1946 and 1963, the Alaska Highway's condition slowly improved and services along the road became more readily available. With the increased services, travelers did not need to carry along quite the assortment of tools and parts that had been recommended in earlier years. In addition to the many travelers in search of adventure and opportunities, many truck drivers traversed the highway, supplying those who worked and lived along the route.[43]

The issue of paving the highway continued to arise during this time period. In 1949, the Alaska Roads Commission began paving the road near Fairbanks and later in the 1950s, reconstructing and paving the entire Alaskan portion of the highway was undertaken by the federal Bureau of Public Roads. Work on the Canadian portion of the Alaska Highway progressed much more slowly, but by the early 1960s, the first 83 miles of the road had been paved. Of course, this still left 1200 miles of highway between the sections unpaved.[44]

The Alaska International Rail and Highway Commission directed the Batelle Memorial Institution in 1961 to prepare a report with ideas "to stimulate economic and demographic growth" in Alaska. The Institute's suggestion that the Alaska Highway

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[42] Randall, 112.
[43] Coates, 224.
[44] Coates, 209.

should be paved spurred supporters to continue their efforts.[45] Two years later, an International Conference on Paving the Alaska Highway met in Whitehorse, with attendees from Canada's northwest and Alaska. However, they proved to be unsuccessful in their attempts to influence the Canadian government.[46]

By the mid-1950s, Canada's military had been eager to relinquish responsibility for the Alaska Highway to the Canadian government, although it would be almost another ten years before they would have the opportunity to do so. Neither the British Columbia provincial government nor the Yukon territorial government was prepared to take control of the highway and so the federal government left the road under the Department of National Defense's supervision. The Canadian Army Engineers and their civilian employees had improved the road slowly, but they did not have the resources for major reconstruction work.[47]

Bridges continued to be the Army's biggest headache as spring thaws would routinely destroy the structures. One of the more spectacular bridge failures was that of the Peace River Bridge, which collapsed on October 16, 1957. For many years, stop-gap efforts had been attempted to shore up the massive suspension bridge, but the river's force finally destroyed the bridge's piers. After detouring auto traffic over the railroad bridge during construction, a new cantilever bridge opened in January 1960.[48]

Finally, on April 1, 1964, the responsibility for the Alaska Highway was transferred from the Canadian Army to Public Works Canada. The Canadian Army had

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[45] Kenneth Coates, "The Civilian Highway: Public Works Canada and the Alaska Highway, 1964-83" in The Alaska Highway: Papers of the 40th Anniversary Symposium, 135.
[46] Coates, North to Alaska, 238.
[47] Coates, North to Alaska, 199-200.
[48] Remley, 190-191.

continued the highway's military legacy from 1946 to 1964, with mixed results. On the one hand, the American public was eager to have a wilderness adventure as they drove the highway, but on the other hand, they also clamored for smoother roads and increased and better amenities. Nevertheless, as the literature shows, the Alaska Highway continued to draw Americans north.

Chapter 5: The Adventure Continues, 1964-1992

Introduction

On April 1, 1964, dignitaries again gathered in Whitehorse, this time for a ceremony transferring responsibility of the Alaska Highway from the Canadian military to Canada's Department of Public Works. With the highway now in civilian hands, many anticipated that real progress would finally be made in upgrading the highway's condition.[1] Public Works Canada had inherited a road that had only been slightly improved over the course of the past eighteen years.

The quest for paving of the highway continued, with limited success. A report from the Stanford Research Institute in 1966, which was commissioned by the Canadian government, recommended against paving the Alaska Highway, saying it was not economically justified. However, it did allow that limited paving in areas of high traffic might be beneficial. The result was a "Paving Through Settled Areas" program, begun in 1968, which was designed primarily to alleviate the dust problems in towns and villages along the highway.[2] The resulting hodge-podge of pavement and gravel over the length of the road proved to be very disconcerting to Alaska Highway travelers.[3]

While paving continued to be an issue for highway proponents for many years, the actual condition of the Alaska Highway as an all-weather road remained, practically speaking, quite good. Travelers who drove sensibly faced very little danger, but still the

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[1] Coates, North to Alaska, 241.
[2] Coates, "Public Works Canada and the Alaska Highway," 138-140.
[3] Coates, North to Alaska, 247.

idea that the highway was a wilderness thoroughfare persisted. Stories of Alaska Highway adventure continued as writers felt compelled to share their journeys with a larger audience.

Road Guides

Before embarking on an Alaska Highway adventure, travelers could consult several different travel guides for help in planning their journeys. From 1964 to 1992, the highway changed tremendously, as far as the quality of the road itself and also the variety of amenities offered along the way. Travel guides changed, as well, and ranged from simple booklets to large compendiums packed with advice and advertising. It was in the travel guides' best interests, however, to continue promoting the Alaska Highway journey as a wilderness adventure.

The 1968-69 edition of the American Automobile Association's Alaska and the Alaska Highway assured its readers that an Alaska Highway journey was still primitive, explaining:

> This is not a trip for those who demand luxurious accommodations, exotic cuisine and four-lane, super highways. For most, the lack of these features is more than compensated for by the rewarding adventure in northland scenery that unfolds constantly along the highway.[4]

However, later in the publication, an assertion was made that, since its initial epic construction, "the Alaska Highway has been regraded and widened until it ranks as one

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[4] Alaska and The Alaska Highway, 1968-69 edition (Washington D.C.: American Automobile Association, 1968), 5.

of the finest gravel highways anywhere."[5] Thus, while it was still foremost a pioneer swath cut through the wilderness, the traveler could now enjoy the pioneer experience more comfortably.

Lou Jacobin's 25th anniversary edition of his Guide to Alaska and the Yukon, published in 1971, also praised the road as "the best gravel highway in the world," but additionally stated that "in spite of the road's safety and continually growing popularity, the Alaska Highway is still an adventure road."[6] In addition, the guide recommended that drivers "pressurize" their vehicles to keep out dust, as well as make "liberal use of plastic bags" to protect cameras, clothes and other items from the dust.[7]

After twenty-five years of publication, Jacobin's guide changed, particularly in content and length. In addition to sections describing the Alaska Highway and the newly launched Alaska ferry system, the 25th edition included many more advertisements than its first publication, as well as color photographs and added maps. Throughout the guide, Jacobin emphasized the frontier adventure found in a vacation to the north but at the same time showed that the traveler would not have to do without the amenities of civilization.

By 1964, The Milepost had accrued a considerable following among Alaska Highway travelers. By the late 1970s, the guide enlarged into a 10-inch by 7 ½- inch manual, with maps, highway logs, and "thousands of facts on every city, town, village,

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[5] Alaska and The Alaska Highway, 1968-69 ed., 15.
[6] Lou Jacobin, Jacobin's Guide to Alaska and the Yukon (Anchorage: Guide to Alaska, Inc., 1971), 90.
[7] Jacobin (1971), 90.

park, wildlife area, campground, and scenic attraction you might want to visit."[8] The larger size could be attributed to larger photos and a dramatic increase in advertising. Even the disclaimer that was added concerning advertisers contributed to the myth of the frontier:

> CAUTION TO TRAVELERS: Some facilities along highways of the Northland may be a bit on the rustic side compared to what you're used to. This is frontier country. You'll get lots of smiles, but not too many frills of city travel. Nevertheless, The Milepost strives diligently to see that advertisers live up to promises.[9]

The Milepost also began billing itself as the "All-the-North Travel Guide" and, by the late 1980s, added "The bible of North Country travel" to its cover.[10] While The Milepost continued to emphasize the wilderness aspect of driving the Alaska Highway, it did acknowledge that the experience had changed somewhat. For instance, the 1989 edition stated: "Although the Alaska Highway does not compare with highways in the Lower 48, it is no longer a wilderness road but rather a road through the wilderness."[11]

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[8] Bob Henning, ed., The Milepost, 31st Edition (Anchorage: Alaska Northwest Publishing Co., 1979), front cover.
[9] The Milepost, 31st edition, 4.
[10] Kris Valencia, ed., The Milepost, 41st Edition (Edmonds, WA: Alaska Northwest Books, 1989), front cover.
[11] The Milepost, 41st edition, 49.

Highway Stories

Through the 1970s and 1980s, a journey on the Alaska Highway was still considered a great American adventure and travelers felt the need to publish their accounts for the benefit of those left behind. Rose Rowell's 1975 book, Camper to Alaska, was born after her husband suggested that "Maybe other folks would enjoy reading about our camper experiences."[12] The publisher of Rowell's book exaggerated the drama in her account, promising the reader more than the book delivered, writing on the inside flap of the dust cover:

> Rose Rowell shows, in Camper to Alaska, the spirit that helped make America. She gives us all a chance to experience this adventure with her. And for all those travelers who have already been fortunate enough to see for themselves the country she describes, Camper to Alaska will reawaken the old thrill of exploring the last real American frontier.[13]

In addition, the publisher recommended that future travelers use Rowell's account "as an inspiration in planning their own journeys."[14] Such language primed the reader for a much greater adventure than Rowell's tale provided. Rowell's story of her journey to Alaska with her husband and adult son and his family was entertaining but was not in any way as exciting or adventurous as the dust jacket led the reader to believe. Undoubtedly, the words "wilderness" and "frontier" on the cover served their purpose by enticing more people to purchase Camper to Alaska than otherwise would have.

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[12] Rose Rowell, Camper to Alaska (Hicksville, NY: Exposition Press, 1975), x.
[13] Rowell, dust cover.
[14] Rowell, dust cover.

The front cover of Alaska and Back in Three Weeks, written by Grace Kamp Bates in 1978, also tempted the reader with the line "We Drove the Alcan." Bates and her husband did drive the Alaska Highway, but only after taking the ferry to Skagway, the train to Whitehorse, the Klondike Highway to Dawson City, the Top of the World and Taylor Highways to Alaska, the Richardson Highway to Fairbanks, the Parks Highway to Anchorage, the Seward Highway to Whittier, the ferry to Valdez, and then the Richardson Highway back to Tok, Alaska. The author confessed that she feared that her husband would turn around and go home if they began their journey by traveling the Alaska Highway. She explained, after discovering there had been wash-outs on the highway:

> My, were we glad our plans were to return by the Alaska Highway. In these plans, really a method to my madness to get to Alaska by going on oil-surfaced roads and ferry, we'd have no alternative but to come home on the feared graveled Alaska Highway – some 1500 miles of it.[15]

After their whirlwind tour of Alaska and the north, Bates and her husband spent less than five days of their three week journey driving the Alaska Highway. The couple rarely stopped longer than one night in any one place and spent most of their northern vacation sitting in their car. Perhaps it was this mode of travel that led the publishers to advise that: "This book would be of particular interest to people near retirement age who are looking forward to a new abundance of vacation time."[16]

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[15] Grace Kamp Bates, Alaska and Back in Three Weeks (New York: Vantage Press, 1978), 6.
[16] Bates, dust cover.

John Tomikel and his wife made their 1979 trip to Alaska in a pick-up truck with a canopy. They had limited funds for their northern journey so they slept in the back of their truck and spent a great deal of time hiking and taking photos. In his book, Alaska Highway Journal, Tomikel wrote: "At milepost 596 we crossed the fabled Yukon Border. It was a fantasy come true and we stopped for photos."[17] While Tomikel's northern experience differed from Bates', his reasons for writing about his adventure resembled hers. Tomikel explains:

> What do I hope to accomplish? Perhaps someone will be interested in duplicating the trip. Or someone may be interested in my impressions of the Alaska Highway and Alaska at this point in time. And, there may be someone who will simply enjoy traveling with us north to Alaska, the land of the midnight sun.[18]

Another difference between Tomikel's and Bates' journeys was the pace of the journey. Bates rushed through Canada and Alaska in three weeks; however, Tomikel took his time and spent nearly two months traveling from his home in Pennsylvania to Alaska and back. After meeting a family who had an excess of problems on the Alaska Highway, Tomikel gave advice to future travelers: "A successful motor trip to Alaska requires adequate time, careful planning, and solid preparation. It is not a trip to be made on a whim as this family had done."[19]

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[17] John Tomikel, Alaska Highway Journal (California, PA: Allegheny Press, 1982), 35.
[18] Tomikel, 5.
[19] Tomikel, 151.

As the Alaska Highway grew closer to its 50th anniversary, nostalgic memoirs began to be published by those who had worked on or traveled over the highway in its early years. These works served to rekindle the original adventure and romance of the road. They also provided excitement and information about the Alaska Highway experience to a new generation of travelers.

Willis Grafe penned a memoir of his Alaska Highway construction days in 1991. From his experiences working with a P.R.A. survey crew from May 1942 until November 1943, Grafe wrote An Oregon Boy in the Yukon because he felt that other books written about the construction of the highway were lacking in first person accounts. He remarked: "Put down here are my recollections and observations of 'How it really was.' It is my hope to transfer that understanding to the mind of the reader as we share the adventure together."[20]

In the introduction to his work, Grafe emphasized that working on the Alaska Highway was serious, hard work and that intrigue and romance rarely entered the picture. His plain language reinforced his no-nonsense attitude:

> The short eighteen months from beginning to end of the work didn't allow much time for anything but tending to business. The Army and civilian workers who did the job were there to work and no time was available for other pursuits. They were making their contribution to winning a world-wide war, and even in isolation that goal wasn't often out of mind.[21]

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[20] Willis Grafe, An Oregon Boy in the Yukon (Albany, OR: Chesnimus Press, 1991), vii.
[21] Grafe, vii.

While Grafe described the hard work and long hours that he and the survey crews contributed in great detail, he also described the social activities that occurred in the evenings and on furloughs. Men participated in fishing, reading, music, and even dancing. The author's descriptions of the men's recreation, as well as all other elements of life with the survey crew, left readers feeling as if they had participated in the construction project with Grafe. An intrigued traveler would want to visit all of the locations described in the book.

Despite Grafe's determination not to romanticize the Alaska Highway, his vivid narration of the northern road's construction did just that. Grafe relied on his own memories, almost fifty years later, to provide the details for his work. Similarly, Hope Morritt wrote her story, Land of the Fireweed, from memories of her experience working in Whitehorse for the Canadian Army Engineers. Beginning in 1946, Morritt worked in various office positions of the Northwest Highway System and stayed in the north until 1951, meeting and marrying her husband, Dan, while there.

Only a teenager when she left her home in Edmonton to head north, Morritt later became a journalist, and it was these skills that enabled her to write a mesmerizing account. Morritt certainly did not try to keep from romanticizing her experiences. For instance, she wrote:

> A new adventure spread before me. I felt a warm glow all over. What an opportunity, I told myself, and I was only seventeen. The comfortable living quarters especially pleased me. Deep inside I was not a true pioneer. I wanted my comfort and yet wanted to experience pioneer life,

> too. I did not know then that the Yukon would forge me into a tough Sourdough in the short span of three months.[22]

Morritt later wrote that her father and grandmother urged her to write about her time in Whitehorse. "They were people who believed that Canadian history was exciting, dramatic, full of intrigue and colorful personalities."[23]

Land of the Fireweed had those qualities as well as an interesting historical backdrop. Morritt's story brought to life an aspect of Alaska Highway history about which very little had been written: the efforts of the Canadian military and the Northwest Highway System to maintain the road. In particular, she romanticized the women working in these organizations.

> The women who worked for the Northwest Highway System in those early days were adventurers. There was a bold fearlessness about them. They were conscientious workers on the job. They kept telephone lines operating day and night, Army accounts balanced, hospital records straight, all-important communication channels open between Whitehorse and Ottawa . . . Whitehorse and Edmonton. (One woman – Dorothy Miller – drove a diesel truck full-time up and down the highway.) And after work, these women climbed mountains, hitch-hiked the length of the road, canoed down rivers, skied across valleys.[24]

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[22] Hope Morritt, Land of the Fireweed: A Young Woman's Story of the Alaska Highway Construction Days (Edmonds, WA: Alaska Northwest Publishing Co., 1985), 10.
[23] Morritt, 180.
[24] Morritt, 139.

These were impressive women, by Morritt's account, and worthy of recognition. However, Morritt's main purpose in writing her book was to increase awareness of the Canadians who toiled on the road between 1946 and 1950. She stated: "I wanted to write of my memories of the erratic, nervous four-year period following the Second World War, when the Canadian Army first took over the maintenance of 1,221 miles of a military road that wove its precarious way through rugged, mountain terrain."[25]

Perhaps one of the most inspiring Alaska Highway memoirs was Iris Woolcock's The Road North. The work was published in 1990, ten years after her death, and taken from her journals. An independent writer and photographer, Woolcock traveled the Alaska Highway in 1947-1948 by herself, driving a jeep and pulling a 33-foot Liberty travel trailer, with her photography equipment and cat, "Sweetie," inside. She was told repeatedly that she wouldn't make it, but Woolcock was determined and wrote:

> But I knew worry wouldn't help and that I'd get along somehow. I was GOING to see Alaska and the country in between , and I was DETERMINED to push through this experiment in trailer travel and living and PROVE that it COULD be done the way I thought it SHOULD be done.[26]

Woolcock personified frontier individualism with her spirited, self-sufficient, and fearless determination to strike out into the unknown frontier. She was also a pioneer in the field of trailer traveling and very opinionated about the subject. On her return to the States,

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[25] Morritt, 188.
[26] Iris Woolcock, The Road North (Anchorage: Greatland Graphics, 1990), 50-51.

Woolcock visited the Liberty trailer factory in Breman, Indiana, so she could explain to the manufacturers just how trailers should be improved for long-distance travel.[27]

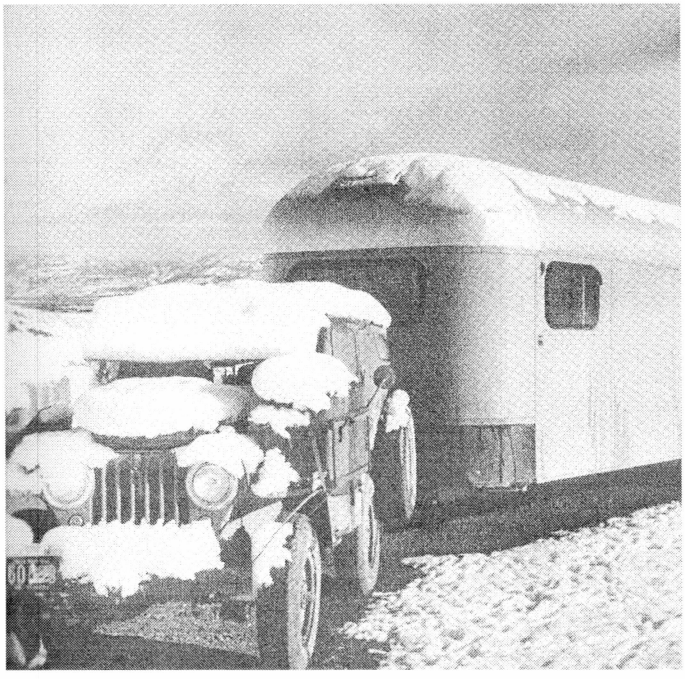

Fig. 5.1 – Iris Woolcock's jeep and trailer along the Alaska Highway.
Iris Woolcock, The Road North (Anchorage: Greatland Graphics, 1991), 83.

The fact that she was a woman driving a jeep and trailer alone up the Alaska Highway intrigued people living along the road and moved them to open their hearts and homes to Woolcock, as well as to provide her with any assistance she needed. Woolcock explained that "Instead of being off in a desolate and lonely place as most of my friends and relatives thought, I was traveling the friendliest road in the world."[28] The reader traveling the highway with Woolcock can't help but be inspired by the writer's tenacity

[27] Woolcock, 148-149.
[28] Woolcock, 87.

and trusting character as well as moved by the helpful folks she met on her travels through the north.

The fiftieth anniversary of the Alaska Highway sparked celebrations and activities in communities up and down the famous road, from Dawson City to Fairbanks. In addition, many books were written and published specifically in honor of the northern thoroughfare. In Fairbanks, the University of Alaska Museum assembled an exhibit of highway memorabilia and historic information to commemorate the road's golden anniversary entitled Alaska or Bust: The Promise of the Road North. A catalog for the Alaska Highway exhibit was published that included a history of the highway, a chapter concerning changes the highway brought to native populations, stories of the Black soldiers who worked on the road, and information about where the exhibit items were obtained.[29]

Several of the works written for the Alaska Highway's anniversary were scholarly historic monographs, composed by distinguished historians, yet their accounts evoke the same wonder and romance of the highway as less serious works. Once a history professor at West Point, Heath Twichell was inspired to write Northwest Epic because of his father's experiences as an Army officer who worked on the highway's construction. Twichell's book was a factual account of how the highway was built, but he also added color and personality to the events and people involved. For instance, in this sentence, Twichell animated machinery: "On April 11, as the first wave of 20-ton bulldozers tore into the woodline, pushing the mangled trees aside into giant windrows, the machines

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[29] Cole, et al.

quickly churned the damp clay silt of the forest floor into an oozing, rutted bog."[30] Twichell's writing style and his title, Northwest Epic, served to romanticize the Alaska Highway as a monumental building feat.

Ken Coates' work, North to Alaska, offered a historic account of the highway's construction as well as a history of the road to 1991. Writing specifically for the Alaska Highway's anniversary, Coates endeavored to promote the highway as "an enduring symbol of the determination to protect this continent from Japanese invasion."[31] A noted Canadian historian, Coates venerated the Northwest as the last frontier of North America and the Alaska Highway as the best way to get there:

> The Alaska Highway is the link, the access, between North and South, between overdeveloped regions and unspoiled wilderness, between past and present. Enfolded in a mystique of its own that goes back to its wartime origins, when, driven by wartime urgency, Americans and Canadians, soldiers and civilians, pushed through a rough pioneer road in less than eight months, the highway affords North Americans unparalled opportunity to experience the northern frontier.[32]

Throughout his book, Coates used first person accounts of those who worked on the highway and lived along its route to bring more excitement and adventure to the historical account than simply reviewing the dates and facts would. Coates explained his reasoning for writing his book in the style and the time that he did, noting: "On the eve of

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[30] Twichell, 109.
[31] Coates, North to Alaska, 10.
[32] Coates, North to Alaska, 11.

the fiftieth anniversary of the Alaska Highway, it is time to recall the history of a unique, remarkable, and delightful road, which ranks among the world's greatest driving adventures."[33]

Stan Cohen applauded Coates' book as "The best actual historical record of the highway"[34] in his 1992 pictorial history, Alcan and Canol. Filled with archival photographs, postcards, maps, advertisements, and even a movie poster, Cohen explained that "This 50th anniversary book is meant to be the definitive photo history of the construction projects."[35] Little of the text in Cohen's work was written by the author. Instead, he included period newspaper clippings, memos, letters, journals, and other sources to explain the photos and other memorabilia. His use of primary sources gives an increased sense of drama and purpose to the highway's construction. For example, a contractor's informational brochure explained:

> This company's work has to do with the building of the Alaska-Canada Military Highway and providing adequate facilities to make the road an important and effective military route. It is considered by most military men as a springboard for attack on Japan as well as an important defensive project in our plans to protect and defend Alaska. It is probably the country's No. 1 war job.[36]

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[33] Coates, North to Alaska, 283.
[34] Cohen, Alcan and Canol, v.
[35] Cohen, Alcan and Canol, v.
[36] "Things You Should Know about your trip and the Alaska Highway Job," in Cohen, Alcan and Canol, 178.

Words written at the time had an added impact and reinforced the highway's importance to America's defense. They also added to the highway's frontier mystique and inspire present-day travelers to recreate the worker's war-time adventures.

Another Alaska Highway commemorative work full of stunning photos and moving text published for the road's anniversary was Along the Alaska Highway. Produced by photographer Alissa Crandall and writer Gloria J. Maschmeyer, the photo essay "speaks to both the armchair voyager and seasoned traveler."[37] The editors explained the book's objective in its preface:

> November 1992 marks the fiftieth anniversary of the Alaska Highway. Once, only a hardy few traveled its rutted course. Today most of the road's rugged twists and punishing surfaces have been tamed, but its mystique remains undiminished. Along the Alaska Highway was created not only to commemorate the birthday of this remarkable thoroughfare, but also to celebrate the vivid world through which it passes.[38]

The world of the Alaska Highway was indeed displayed vividly in Crandall and Maschmeyer's work. While the book includes some black and white images of the highway's early days, the reader was drawn to the large colorful photos of the current highway, surrounded by all of nature's grandeur. Crandall wrote that fifty years previously the highway "cut a swath through the wilderness," and, while many

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[37] Alissa Crandall and Gloria J. Maschmeyer, Along the Alaska Highway (Bothell, WA: Alaska Northwest Books, 1991), 5.
[38] Crandall and Maschmeyer, 5.

improvements had been made to the road, "It remains an adventure, crossing some of the most remote landscapes in the world."[39]

Conclusion

Thus fiftieth anniversary publications and events once again enticed travelers to journey northward over the historic Alaska Highway for a wilderness adventure of their own. By 1992, the highway was completely paved and accommodations and services were readily available along the length of the road, but still, there was (and is) the inevitable road construction always in progress somewhere on the highway that could provide a nostalgic reminder of the road's early years.

One section where road construction has commonly waylaid highway travelers is between Haines Junction and the Alaska border and has its origins in a joint U.S.-Canadian project begun in 1977. In 1973, negotiations began between the two countries to improve and pave the Haines Highway and section of the Alaska Highway that connected to the Alaska border. The U.S. instigated the plan in order to provide decent roads from Alaska to the tidewater at Haines, where travelers could board the recently created Alaska Ferry System. After years of negotiations, an agreement was finally ratified in January 1977. The Shakwak Project (named for a valley near the St. Elias Mountains) was to be funded by the U.S. and was scheduled for completion in 1989. Unfortunately, funds and interest in the project varied from year to year, depending on

[39] Crandall and Maschmeyer, 13.

which political party controlled Congress, with the result being that work on the project is still underway in 2006.[40]

In addition to the recent paving, the mid-1970s brought another change to the pioneer Alaska Highway experience. For many years, mileposts marked the distances between points on the highway and were even the source of names for outposts and communities, for instance, the town of Wonowon, located at mile 101 on the Alaska Highway. The classic markers were often stolen for souvenirs and had to be replaced every summer. In 1975, a major change occurred when Canada shifted to the metric system and all mileposts along the Alaska Highway became kilometerposts. The Milepost began listing both kilometers and miles to aid confused travelers, but discrepancies still arose at the Alaska-Yukon border.[41]

Those who journeyed up the Alaska Highway between 1964 and 1992 did so for a myriad of reasons. In the late 1960s and 1970s, many traveled the highway with the goal of reaching Alaska and making their fortunes working on the construction of the Trans-Alaska pipeline. Some made the trip to participate in the Alaska Highway's fiftieth anniversary celebrations. But most came north after reading and dreaming about an Alaska Highway adventure and sought to have their own wilderness experience in the last frontier.

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[40] Coates, "Public Works Canada and the Alaska Highway", 142-145.
[41] Coates, North to Alaska, 268-270.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

The Modern Highway

The Alaska Highway continues to be a well-traveled road, with adventure-seekers from all over the world journeying north for a wilderness experience. More often than not, highway travelers drive the road in a recreational vehicle and have dreamed and planned for their northern vacation for many years. While the journey no longer poses the hazards and risks that a traveler in the 1940s and 1950s would have experienced, the wilderness setting and historical background of the Alaska Highway thrill and awe the modern traveler just the same.

Highway conditions are always improving, and amenities and accommodations have changed over the years to keep up with the modern traveler. Services offered range from satellite T.V. and Internet connections to movie rentals and massage therapists at hotels and R.V. parks. In addition, travelers have the option of leaving the main highway for helicopter and small plane tours, fishing excursions, photography expeditions, horseback and bicycle trips, whitewater rafting, and many other activities that allow the traveler to realize the wilderness or frontier experience he or she seeks. Winter tourism and ecotourism are also being promoted to attract a wider range of visitors and to expand the tourist season in the north.

World and national issues also affect the travel plans of Alaska Highway visitors. The September 11 terrorist attack on the U.S., as well as the skyrocketing price of oil, have raised safety and economic concerns that have affected tourism along the Alaska

Highway in both positive and negative ways. On the one hand, many travelers would rather pay more for gas and drive to Alaska for a vacation than risk flying overseas. Conversely, anti-terrorism restrictions at the U.S.-Canadian borders have slowed crossings and caused aggravation to some. These restrictions continue to change and on December 31, 2007, a new U.S. rule, the "Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative," will be implemented. Under the initiative, passports will be necessary for U.S. citizens to travel between the U.S. and Canada.[1]

In the early twenty-first century, more than sixty years after the road was completed, the urge to drive the Alaska Highway has not diminished as a great American adventure, but in some cases the speed of the journey, the mode of transportation, and the venue for sharing Alaska Highway stories have changed. For instance, Steve Monk shares "Steve's Alaska Highway Adventure" on his Internet web site. His unusual journey on the highway lasted from July 16 to 18, 1997, with his purpose being to "Deliver the beautiful mint-condition Merkur XR4Ti I bought in Sacramento, California, back home to Fairbanks in the best condition possible."[2] While driving the Alaska Highway in three days is not the goal of many travelers, Steve's whirlwind trip was very personally satisfying. He writes: "This was a fantastic drive and I highly recommend it to anyone who has the opportunity."[3]

Perhaps owing to the much improved condition of the road, motorcycling the Alaska Highway has recently become an increasingly popular way to travel to the north.

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[1] John Eichelberger, "Trouble at Alaska-Canada Border" in Fairbanks Daily News-Miner, October 1, 2005 <http://www.news-miner.com/cda/article/print> (01 Oct. 2005).
[2] Steve Munk, "Steve's Highway Adventure," July 24, 1997 <http://www.arsc.edu/~munk/alcan/> (10 Jan. 2002), 1.
[3] Munk, 5.

Jamie Elvidge traveled with two friends by motorcycle to Alaska and published an article about their adventure in the December 1999 issue of Motorcycle Cruiser magazine. Eldridge offers personable and humorous reflections as she shares the group's concerns and excitement, writing "Sure we'd read the books and stared at the maps, but the truth was, we had absolutely no idea what lay ahead."[4] The riders had an epic adventure, encountering wildlife, beautiful scenery, "Peanut M&M-sized hail,"[5] weird hotels, scrumptious baked goods, and the inevitable road construction, which provides a unique challenge for motorcycle travelers. Elvidge concludes her article with this opinion of the northern road:

> The Alaska Highway is a very long two-lane back road that skirts modern reality. It's perhaps the only way to absolutely experience what it must have been like to set out 60 years ago when our mainland routes were lonely, meandering affairs. In comparison, our precious Route 66 is nostalgic nothingness – an idealized frontage road cowering beside a major interstate. The Alaska Highway is the real thing. It's that bit of uncertainty and pinch of gut which season the most memorable adventures.[6]

Words similar to Elvidge's can be found in Alaska Highway travel stories from the 1940s to the present day. The highway's mystique has not diminished over time and remains a means for a great American adventure.

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[4] Jamie Elvidge, "Motorcycling the Alaska Highway," in Motorcycle Cruiser magazine, Dec. 1999 <http://www.motorcyclecruiser.com/rideanddest/Alaska/> (16 Mar. 2006), 1.
[5] Elvidge, 3.
[6] Elvidge, 9.

Frontier Romance and the Alaska Highway

In a magazine article about her trip up the highway, Betty Boyd remarked: "If anyone tells us that the days of the pioneers are gone, we won't believe them! Every person who drives the Alaska Highway is a pioneer for a time, whether he intends to be or not."[7] Boyd was writing about her journey in 1946, but the romance of driving the Alaska Highway is still available to those coming up the road today. However, today's romance is provided by the breathtaking scenery, wildlife, and history that are found nowhere else in the world, rather than primitive highway conditions.

The frontier romance of the highway is perpetuated today by its emotional appeal to Americans' need for adventure and an escape from the ordinary. This urge to seek new frontiers would not surprise Frederick Jackson Turner, who wrote in his influential thesis more than a century earlier:

> American social development has been continually beginning over again on the frontier. This perennial rebirth, this fluidity of American life, this expansion westward with its new opportunities, its continuous touch with the simplicity of primitive society, furnish the forces dominating American character.[8]

In other words, Americans have historically pushed through boundaries. It seems to be part of the American character and what sets Americans apart from the rest of the world. Dr. Judith Kleinfeld describes this phenomenon as "The Frontier Frame of Mind,"

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[7] Boyd, 8.
[8] Turner, 2-3.

explaining that "the spiritual quality that most clearly defines what it means to be an American is the drive towards the frontiers of our existence."[9]

Kleinfeld further states that "The frontier is our national romance," and "The romance of a culture shape people's ideas and the way they live."[10] Americans have grown up with stories of pioneers who have set out into new frontiers and experienced wonderful adventures and accomplishments. The Alaska Highway is an accessible frontier that continues to provide an outlet for Americans to experience a romantic adventure of their own.

Since its construction, literature has romanticized the Alaska Highway as a way or a place for Americans to live out their frontier dreams. Even today, Americans are fascinated with the epic story of the highway's construction, as well as the wilderness environment the highway traverses. Over time, the "I drove the Alaska Highway" books, travel guides, and historic works have lured many Americans north for their own wilderness adventures on the Alaska Highway. The romance of the Alaska Highway has been perpetuated by this genre of literature and continues to inspire the American frontier dream.

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[9] Kleinfeld, 20-21.
[10] Kleinfeld, 21.

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